

Evil is coming (spoiler inside)

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Summary: Two years after the battle with Drago, Hiccup and Astrid are about to start a family and are finally enjoying their happiness. Until the return of a terrible threat which will press on Berk and its inhabitants, Vikings as dragons.

## 1. Chapter 1

**\*\*Hi everyone! This is my first fiction about HTTYD! I love those movies so much that I had to write something! I hope you'll enjoy it, HTTYD 2 was just amazing, the best movie ever! \*\***

**\*\*Enjoy your reading, don't be too hard, English isn't my native language! \*\***

**\*\*SPOILER INSIDE! SPOILER INSIDE! SPOILER INSIDE!\*\***

**\*\*Read and Review :D\*\***

**\*\*XXX\*\***

His hands behind his back, Hiccup stopped a moment his coming and going, just to watch the first rays of dawn brighten the sky of blazing colors. If usual this view delighted him, he felt nothing more than a dull, deep anguish this morning, and he started again pacing.

And yet, the night had started well.

As every evening, they were huddled one against the other, and had chatted until it was very late. It was a kind of ritual, which they followed for years, long before their wedding, the only difference was that now, when they spoke, they were cuddling, in their own bed, in their own home. Often, she asked him to tell her every detail about his flights with Toothless and then, with Stormfly. She was terribly frustrated to be nailed to the ground, but a pregnant woman,

as tough and brave as she could be, had no place in the air, even Hiccup was in agreement with this.

Since the middle of her pregnancy, he was taking care of Stormfly, making sure that the dragon had enough exercise every day, even if Stormfly, reluctant at first, gave him some hot moments, in every sense of the word. A loud scream sounded from inside the house, a cry of pain that made him feel sick. He felt his knees going weak, as if his body was ready to crumble, but he didn't hesitate to run to stop Toothless, who had rushed to the front door growling and whimpering.

"No bud, it'sâ€¦ it's okay, nobody is hurting her, not really I meanâ€¦ Don't worry buddy, everything is going to be alrightâ€¦ I guessâ€¦"

Toothless grunted again and stared at Hiccup as if he was responsibleâ€¦ and he was, in a sense.

He wasn't impressed by the threatening look, and twined his arms around the neck of the dragon to come there snuggling his face.

"Everything is going to be alright" he said in a whisper, as if trying to convince himself.

He understood that something was wrong when he felt her tightened against him, her face was twisted in pain and then her blue eyes were wide with surprise. She had just lost waters while the first pains already appeared.

He heard a new cry and had to suppress the urge to rush inside. He buried his head deeper against Toothless, trying to find a thin comfort in the hot and scaly dragon skin. Astrid was strong, she was strong and courageous, everything would be alright, and everything had to be.

As whenever he felt anxiety about to submerge him, he focused on the memory of their wedding day. Her radiant smile, the wild flowers braided in a Crown gently resting on her long blond hair, released for the occasion. Her dress was dazzling white, which made her look like an angel.

A few years ago, if someone had told him that he would marry Astrid Hofferson and then start a family with her, he would have laughed in that person's face. Or he would have simply turned on his heels, thinking that it was again a joke at his expense. And yet it happened. And even years later, it still amazed him. The dragons had literally changed his life, he owed them everything.

When another cry came from the house, he froze, it was as if his blood had turned in to ice. What if...

"Noâ€¦ No, no what if, everything is going to be okay, it's fine, everything is okay..." he whispered, shaking his head in order to clear his feelings.

He knew that she was in good hands, their respective mothers looking after her.

Still, he would have liked to stay with her, to support her, to hold her hand, but Ayanelle Hofferson put him out, claiming that the men should leave to women what belonged to women. He had seen the skeptical gaze of Val, his mother, but she said nothing, after all, she was back for two years only. The legitimacy of her actions was still fragile in Berk, and she accepted that without blinking.

He had spent a sleepless night, and yet, he had never felt so awake. The scare he strove to ignore ran in his veins like a frigid fluid which paralyzed him at every cry. Astrid was not cozy, she was resistant, she had so many burns and wounds, and she had never moaned, had never complained. Then, hearing her shouting as if she was tortured, giving cries of agony, was probably the most terrifying thing he had had to live. He had never missed his father as much as he was right now. He would have given everything to hear his deep and powerful voice reassure him on what was going on.

"Hiccup!"

He jumped, releasing Krokmu and nearly dropping, his gaze staring at the gate, where Val stood in the doorway. She was livid.

"Go fetch Gothi, be fast"

He had the impression that the ground was collapsing under his feet. If they needed Gothi, it was bad, very bad. He wanted to rush inside, to run upstairs, to see Astrid, to take her in his arms, to hold her and to never let her go.

"Hiccup, move!"

The urgency in his mother's voice pulled him out of his lethargy. She turned away and disappeared inside while a new cry tore his heart and he couldn't suppress a sob. It was supposed to be a wonderful day, it was supposed to be a happy and magic moment, they were supposed to meet their first child with tears of happinessâ€¦ Astridâ€¦ He couldn't lose her, he would be lost without her, he would die if something happened to herâ€¦

As if he felt that Hiccup was unable to formulate any coherent thought, Toothless nudged him slightly with his muzzle, inviting him to climb on his back, what Hiccup did automatically without even thinking about it. When he found himself before Gothi's house, which dominated the entire village asleep, he seemed to regain control of himself. He drummed at the door with his fists.

"Gothi! We need you! Astrid needs you, please!"

His voice broke. Fortunately, the door opened immediately, so fast that he wondered if Gothi was sleeping right behind it. The old lady had already passed a bag on her shoulder, she observed him for a few seconds, his distraught face, his eyes full of tears. She nodded and just went forward Toothless. The dragon leaned over his head to one side to watch her with curiosity, but remained still when she began to climb on his back. Hiccup rushed to help her and sat before her. A few seconds later they were in front of his house.

"Stay here buddy!" exclaimed Hiccup following Gothi inside.

They were welcomed with a long, appalling scream. Hiccup passed

before Gothi, climbed the steps two by two, ignoring the squeak of his prosthesis that protested, and entered the room, sending the door against the wall in a loud bang. Val and Ayanelle Hofferson stared at him with surprise.

"Hiccup? Where is Gothi?"

"Hiccup, you have to get out!"

But he wasn't listening. He felt like he had been stabbed in his chest, as if he couldn't breathe anymore, as if his lungs were empty.

He was facing Astrid, and this vision, he was sure, would haunt him for his entire life.

Her skin was so pale, almost grey, glowing with sweat, her breathing was so low that her chest was barely raising, and a pool of blood spread on the bed, between her legs three-quarters covered by a sheet. He felt a taste of bile in his throat and had the impression that the world was quivering.

"Astrid!"

He felt like he yelled, but only a whisper escaped his lips. Two hands seized him firmly by his shoulders and led him out of the room, he had time to see Gothi already busy around her patient before the door closed.

"Hiccup, you can't do anything for her, you have to trust us..."

His mother's voice made him finally react. His eyes filled with tears.

"Mum..."

He had never felt so small, so insignificant, so useless... His feeling of helplessness was overwhelming.

Everything seemed to take a dramatic turn around him. Toothless, his leg, his father... And now his wife! He felt like a little boy, but if he was grateful to have his mother back, he missed his father so much. Their relationships were not simple when he was a teenager, but during his childhood, it was his father who consoled him when he was injured or when he had a nightmare... His father was the one present in good and bad moments! And now, he was gone, and Hiccup had to face all this without his help. His duties as the new chief, his wedding, him becoming a father. It felt so wrong, he still needed his father!

"My boy! She's strong, she's going to be fine!"

He burst into tears, his mother hugged him. Toothless, who heard the cries of the young Viking from the outside, went up upstairs. He put his snout against Hiccup, and waited with a low purr. His big eyes expressed a sadness so human that a new wave of tears hit him. Losing Astrid was unthinkable. She was his best friend, with Toothless, and she was the person around which he had built his universe, she was his heart and his soul, they had lived so many things, despite

everything, they were more and more in love with each other.

Astrid was a warrior, she would win this one, she had to. He remembered her sighing, hugging Stormfly, muttering about how sick she was of being trapped in her own body. And he couldn't help but have a smug smile, which inevitably owed him a punch in his arm. But he couldn't stop it, seeing her belly growing around their treasure, around the result of their love, it was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen, and he felt incredibly lucky. What if she died? What if they died?

A cry startled them, Hiccup wanted to rush to the door, but Val stopped him. And then a terrible, deafening, silence descended in the house, a silence so heavy that Hiccup had the impression that the air was solidified in his lungs and around him.

"No..." he whispered.

The pain he felt was overwhelming, he fell to his knees, then his heart began to throb when a low cry, a young and trembling vagitus, rose. The cry of a newborn. He immediately straightened, his heart beating at a great rate, his throat was tied, his eyes fixed on the door. It eventually opened, and Ayanelle appeared, carrying a small package wrapped in a fur with caution. With a smile, she handed him to Hiccup.

"Your daughterâ€|"

When he extended his arms, he was shaking. He grabbed the newborn, and took his daughter awkwardly against him. He had faced dragons, criminals, warriors... But nothing seemed as scary as this tiny already sleepy girl in his arms. She had a small round face, slightly chubby and pink, she had long eyelashes, and thin blond hair dotted her skull. With a hesitant gesture, he caressed her cheek from the tip of his fingers. She was so sweet. So perfect despite the substances that were still covering her. His daughter, their daughter. His world came to be placed upside down by a tiny baby, he was a father, it was so new, so scary, he had the impression of being on the edge of a precipice to which he was irrevocably drawn. And he felt a breath of love, an instinctive, visceral love swell in his heart. His daughter... Toothless pushed him with his snout in his back, reminding him of his presence.

Hiccup couldn't help but smile, he turned to present the child to the dragon. Toothless stepped back at first, but his curiosity took the top. He approached hesitantly and sniffed the girl, who was still sleeping, unperturbed.

"This is my daughter, buddy, my baby, can you imagine, I am a father, Astrid and I are parents! You'll take care of her, won't you? Just like you take care of Astridâ€|"

Toothless bent his head and released what sounded like a laugh, but that Harold knew identify as an assent. He turned to his mother, who took the baby against her with a radiant smile and overflowing love. Then he turned to Ayanelle.

"Can I see Astrid?"

She turned pale and his smile vanished. Hiccup swallowed hard while

he had the sensation that an icy hand tightened around his heart.

"How is she? Tell me how is she!"

"She lost a lot of blood, sheâ€¦"

But he left her no time to complete her sentence, he rushed in the room. Gothi was putting the blood-stained sheets in a corner of the room before turning to Hiccup.

He couldn't take his eyes of Astrid. Her hair had been braided, she had been changed, but her face was shiny with sweat and still pale. He knelt next to her, and took one of her hands in his own. She was so small, so still... so dead... Astrid's hands were never still, they were still active, full of life, they were rough, covered with burns, scars, they drove continually, to take care of the Dragons, to train in the use of weapons, even when she was just talking, her hands were moving. So the vision of her inert hand was worse than anything.

"Gothi told us that if she survives the day, she'll be saved. The child will have yak's milk in the meantime..." explained Val, who had entered without a noise behind him.

Hiccup nodded weakly. Gothi appointed two pots and a cup placed on a table.

"She had to drink this potion twice a day, a cup at noon, another at the nightfall."

Hiccup opened his mouth to answer, but he had to clear his throat.

"Thank youâ€¦" he said in a whisper so low that he wasn't sure if he had been heard, but Gothi nodded and headed for the door.

"Astrid is strong... "

With these words, Val went to see Gothi out, and Hiccup heard the door close. Silence descended again, terrible and oppressive. He had to do something, to talk, to act...

"Astridâ€¦ Our daughterâ€¦ She's finally hereâ€¦ And she's so beautiful, you should see how tiny she is, she's as beautiful as you are, I haven't seen her eyes yet, she's deeply asleep, she takes it from me at least..."

His attempt at humor rang ominously without Astrid's wonderful laugh to accommodate his jokes.

"You have to wake up Astrid, you have to meet her, she... she needs you... I'm a disaster, you know how fast I can mess up everything, I can hardly take care of myself, I'm so clumsy, and it's scary, she's so tiny, so fragile, I need you to become a parent, we are supposed to do that togetherâ€¦ You are strong, you are brilliant, you are so beautiful... You'll figure out what to do... Please, wake up, open your eyes, pleaseâ€¦"

His voice died. He clung to her hand as if his life depended on it.

The day was going to be long and grueling, but he would not let her go. No matter how much time it would take.

## 2. Chapter 2

**\*\*Hi everyone! First of all, I'd like to thank all of you for your reviews! It's such a long and hard job to translate my fiction, that reading your reviews was the best gift ever!\*\***

**\*\*So, I hope you'll enjoy this new chapter!\*\***

**\*\*And to answer to greenshade15, my name isn't Amelina, I wish it is, but my name is Amel, Lina is my 5 years old daughter and I put "sa" because my 3 years old daughter's name is Sara. But yeah, Amelina would be a nice name!\*\***

**\*\*ENJOY & READ & REVIEW!\*\***

Hiccup saw clouds of smoke before even reaching the village. His heart began to beat faster, his blood throbbed dully in his ears, and Toothless accelerated, forcing the young Viking to flatten on his back. Blue skies gave way to a sky obscured by thick black smoke that invades his lungs and made him cough. His eyes began to sting and had to pucker to try to see something.

Berk was in flames.

He felt as if he had received a blow. Seen from the sky, the village was no more than a heap of charred ruins, ravaged by high destructive flames. There was not a sound, meant only the crackling of the fire. Without even waiting for a directive from Hiccup, Toothless rushed to the top of the village, towards their house. No inhabitant was visible, where were they all? Harold began to hope that they have found refuge farther on the island, that they are all safe and sound, but it was then that an inhuman scream rent the silence. Harold felt that his heart was stalled and fell across his feet to be engulfed by the ground. The cry came from his house.

"Astrid!" he screamed.

"Hiccup, help me!"

The horror halted him for a few seconds. The young woman's voice came from inside the house, which had become an inferno, the flames were so high they were disappearing into the thick smoke that dominated the village. Hiccup leapt ashore once Toothless was sufficiently close to the ground and rushed to the house.

"Astrid! Astrid!"

"Help me please, Hiccup!"

A new cry of pain seemed to freeze his blood.

The warmth that emanated from the fire was unbearable, yet Hiccup felt more nothing, if it wasn't a deep terror and a visceral need to enter, to exit Astrid from there. He wanted to rush to the door, but Toothless groaned and stood between him and the house, keeping him away.

"Toothless, what the hell are you doing! Let me! I need to go inside! I need to save Astrid!" screamed Hiccup, trying to circumvent his dragon, his eyes fixed on the house, as mesmerized by the flames, as if one second of inattention could seal the fate of Astrid.

He had the impression to lose his mind, to be unable to reflect or to think, all that he saw and heard, was his house in flames, in which was trapped the most important person in the world to his eyes.

Toothless shook his head, scolding and threw himself on Harold to grab his arm in his mouth in order to resolutely drive him away from the house.

"No! No Toothless! Let me go! Let me go! Iâ€¦ I have toâ€¦ Astridâ€¦ Noâ€¦" screamed the young Viking, struggling.

He didn't even feel the tears that were rolling on his cheeks, his words collided, he was unable to formulate a sensible sentence, the silence that met his howling was terrifying. A cracking sound broke it and the house collapsed.

The world stopped. The ground was collapsing under his legs. Oxygen seemed to have deserted the world.

"Noooooooo!"

Hiccup opened his eyes and leapt, breathing heavily, sweat covering his face, his neck sore and rigid... He looked around him, having a blank, then a wave of relief overwhelmed. It was a nightmare, a vulgar nightmare. His throat was dry and his lungs were painful.

"Hiccup?"

He shuddered and his eyes rested upon Astrid. Still lying, she smiled weakly, turning her head towards him.

"Astrid!" he cried, helping her to sit to immediately crush her against him. Feeling her in his arms, breathing, living, was a wonderful and incredible sensation. He felt as if he had been caught in a storm, his feelings were upside down, he was still upset by his nightmare, relieved that it was only nightmare, still shocked by the delivery, terrified at the prospect of losing Astrid, relieved to see her conscious... He wanted to laugh while feeling about to burst into tears.

But he had to get over it, Astrid needed him.

"How do you feel? Do you want me to get Gothi back? Do you need something? Are you in pain?" he asked, releasing her, his eyes peering into her face, looking for the slightest sign indicating that she may need additional care.

Astrid frowned and snorted.

"Easy babe, I'mâ€¦fineâ€¦ I guessâ€¦I feel... Exhausted... And it is as if... As if I've been crushed by a herd of yaks...And..."



In a purely instinctive gesture, her hands landed on her belly, not meeting the huge one she used to have. Her eyes widened with horror and fear, and then, she remembered everything. The loss of water, the more and more insurmountable pain, the worried faces of her mother and her mother-in-law. The inhuman screams that seemed so strange and which, nevertheless, escaped her own lips.

"Hiccup..." she whispered, her eyes filling with tears.

"Hey, it's okay, everything is okay, our daughter is fine, more than fine!" he replied, caressing her cheek gently.

She seemed not to believe him, and looked at him with such hope and fear that he felt his heart melt. She looked so vulnerable right now, he just wanted to take her in his arms and to never let her go. She swallowed and he could read so many feelings in her eyes. She was afraid. Incredulous, febrile, frightened.

"Our... daughter?" she said weakly.

Hiccup, moved, nodded with a smile. He walked out of the room and came back with a little bundle in his arms, Toothless following him like his shadow. The dragon hadn't ceased to observe the little girl, and almost didn't leave her side since her birth. Hiccup gave the child to Astrid, who hesitated, and then took her carefully in her arms. Tears escaped from her eyes.

"Our daughter..." she said softly, gazing at the little girl with delight.

Hiccup felt a new breath of emotion seeing Astrid and their child. He was amazed by this scene, he couldn't believe he was so lucky.

"How long did I remain unconscious?" she asked.

"It's the morning of the second day..."

Astrid nodded, she could see how afraid he had been during those past hours. She didn't remember much about the birth itself, the feeling of becoming a mother, without attending the moment where she became one, was deeply destabilizing. She returned to her contemplation. Her baby girl yawned without waking so far.

"She's so beautiful..." She said tenderly.

Hiccup settled on the edge of the bed, next to Astrid, and they contemplated their daughter with a love they had never felt. A new feeling, completely overwhelming.

"You have been so brave, so strong! I'm so proud of you" he said, kissing her forehead.

"I love you Hiccup..." she muttered.

"I love you too, so much, and! I've never been so scared in my entire life! I thought I was going to lose you!"

His voice crackled. He shot his eyes, focusing on the smell of her hair.

"Even when you found Toothless?" she asked playfully.

But he remained serious, his gaze full of concern and a deep love.

"I can't lose you!"

"You won't, I promise! I love you!"

The young Viking smiled. Astrid wasn't the most demonstrative in their couple, but it made each statement all the more valuable. He passed an arm around her shoulders and he placed a kiss on her right cheek.

"I love you too, more than anything..."

Toothless, sitting on the other side of the bed, grunted and sent flying a shield to the ground with his tail, while maintaining a stolid air. Astrid and Harold burst out laughing.

"We love you too, bud!" exclaimed Hiccup.

The dragon seemed pleased and rested his head on the mattress, still gazing at the baby. A look that Hiccup knew only too well. A look full of love, a possessive gaze, a look of protective instinct. In a flash, he remembered Toothless taking his arm in his mouth, driving him away from the burning home. Hiccup felt his throat was tightening, he could hardly swallow. He had difficulty swallowing, shook his head, and kept Astrid against him. It was just a nightmare...

Ooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo

"Our daughter is an ogre!" said Astrid, dropping herself next to Hiccup, whose sleeping form barely reacted, he was curled under thick blankets and warm furs.

Astrid groaned and pulled out the blankets, revealing a bare torso. He shuddered as soon as the fresh air came contact with his skin, and he raised a sleepy head.

"What? That? Happens!"

Astrid would have laughed if she wasn't so exhausted or frustrated. But she was, so she punched his shoulder.

"Wake up my dear chief! Time to open your lovely lazy eyes!"

"I... That... Sleep..." muttered Hiccup, before curling himself.

Astrid let out a sigh of frustration and shook him.

"Come on! Wake up! I should be the one sleeping, do you even know how many times a night I have to get up to feed our daughter! But no, Mister Chief doesn't hear anything, you wouldn't hear a dragon singing in your ears, would you?"

Hiccup realized there was no point in trying to sleep a little more. He sat down and rubbed his eyes. Astrid had always liked the way he

did that, he was just so cute, like a little boy just waking up, but when he looked at her, she strove to keep an impassive air.

"I know... I'mâ€|sorry, I guess..."

"You guess? Do you want me to teach you how sorry you are?" she snorted, crossing her arms.

"But to be fair, I can't really feed her, can I?" he added with a sheepish smile.

He seemed as sincere as exhausted. Wide and black rings circled his eyes, and Astrid often felt him struggling in his sleep. Her fierce expression gave way to a worried one. She put a hand on his rough cheek and gazed at his tired eyes.

"Hiccup, what's going on? You don't sleep well, you seem exhausted all the time, something's bothering you?"

For a brief moment, he considered the idea of just telling her.

That every night, he had nightmares, since the birth of their daughter, his sleep was restless. He was tirelessly reliving this terrifying dream in which Berk was embroiled in flames and in which he was unable to save Astrid. Besides, the memories of the birth haunted him, the grayish face of Astrid and her screams of pain. When he dreamed, his sleep was profound and nothing could wake him. He remained prisoner of his nightmares until his body wakes up by itself.

"I'm tired..."

Astrid wasn't convinced. She chewed her lower lip, and proceeded to braid a strand of his hair

"Hiccup, I know that the birth... wasn't, well... easy for you..." she said carefully.

Hiccup swallowed, thinking back to this day both cursed and blessed.

"Iâ€| I almost lost you...Both of you" he said in a hoarse voice.

"But you didn't! And our baby is healthy! she replied.

"I know... I know you're right..."

"Focus on the positive" she said, ending the braid before getting up from the bed.

Hiccup tried to catch her, but she escaped with a laugh.

"The sun is raised, and do you know what day is it?" she asked, her hands on her hips.

"Hmmm...Let me seeâ€| The day we stay in bed to do things... well, you know, things?" he asked with a suggestive smile.

Astrid raised her eyebrows but her cheeks flushed.

"Remind me to punch you for what you just said" she mumbled.

"Sure, gladly" he laughed.

"It's the day I'll be able to fly again with Stormfly!"

Her face was enlightened with unrestrained joy. Her good humor was contagious and Hiccup felt the weight of his bad dreams relieving. He grabbed his prosthesis and began to fix it.

Astrid began to pace, waving her hands in all directions while she spoke at any speed.

"Gothi said that I could go back today, of course, I would start by small flights, but within a few weeks, I'll be ready for patrols! As far as I'm concerned, and I am, I think I'm ready, but anyway! Patrols take that a few hours a day, my mother and your mother will take turns to take care of our small otter..."

"Otter?" he repeated, with an amused smile.

"What? Otters are cute! And as long as she doesn't have a name, I call her just like I want!" she replied, keeping her head high with pride.

Berk's Viking had an ancestral tradition which was to name the newborns at the first full moon following their birth. They considered that thus, Mani, the god of the moon, would bring a prosperous life to the young child. The next full moon would take place in a few days and they hadn't agreed yet for a name.

"You know that Snotlout suggested to name her Snotlouta?"

They burst out laughing.

"He can't be serious! What did you say?"

"That there can be no question about naming our daughter after him! And he said that it was only a stupid baby!"

"I think he missed my fist in his ugly face!" scolded Astrid, her eyes glaring with anger, while Hiccup tried to suppress his laugh.

He stood, wrapped his arms around her waist and kissed her.

"On the other hand, he added, Fishlegs asked to babysit her time to time, and I could have sworn that the twins were jealous!"

Astrid smiled with amusement. They were the first of their friends to have a child, Snotlout was engaged, Ruffnut was going to be engaged, but nobody had gone as far as Hiccup and Astrid did. Getting married, starting a family.

"Well, they'll have to queue up with Toothless and Stormfly!"

Their respective dragons were extremely protective and attached to the baby. As soon as she cried, they disembarked stormed in the house, ready to fire who dared upset the little girl. Until Astrid

gets mad at the umpteenth door shattered by their unexpected landing. Since then, the two dragons seemed to control themselves, and were wisely waiting when the newborn's cries reverberated in the house.

They took their breakfast, one eating while the other was holding the little girl. Hiccup babbled, laughing to see her little smile, her small fists pounding the air with enthusiasm. She already looked like Astrid, but he was pleased that she had his green eyes, even if he loved Astrid's blue ones. His daughter was the most beautiful creation of the universe. With his wife. And Toothless.

"Kids? Are you here?"

The front door slammed and Val appeared in the room. Her eyes immediately searched for her granddaughter before rushing to her with enchanted exclamations. Hiccup and Astrid shared an amused look.

"Oooh dear, look at you, how pretty you are, look at her tiny fists, I remember when you were a baby Hiccup, how strong you sank your small fists around my hair and you pulled it, it made you laugh... Oooh hi tiny little marvel, oooh you have the most beautiful smile ever sweetheart..."

"Humâ€¦ Mum, helloâ€¦"

Val suddenly sat up and looked at them as if she saw them for the first time.

"Oh by Odin, I almost forgot, hello my kids! You can go, and take your time!"

Without understanding how, they found themselves outside their own home.

"Awâ€¦ Have we just been kicked out of our home by my mother? " asked Hiccup, staring at the shut door.

"Yepâ€¦ And I thought my mother would drive us insane!"

"Nope, mine is definitely worse!"

They made their way to the arena. Harold shivered. Winter was ahead, inhabitants were concerned, they hadn't had enough time to finish the harvest before the first frosts, and they feared that ships would be prematurely blocked by ice, preventing them from providing supplies of basic necessities on the nearest island, which was in six days from Berk by sea. Toothless waddled behind them, unhappy to have to leave the baby.

"I come with you to the arena" said proudly Hiccup.

"Don't you have a meeting in the Great Hall?" asked Astrid, tightening her fur around her.

"Gobber will start without me, I'll join him later, I won't miss your first flight for months!"

Astrid smiled, stood on the tip of her toes and placed a soft kiss on

his cheek.

"Thank you for being soâ€¦ so you"

"I can't help myself!" replied Hiccup with a goofy smile.

They hadn't reached the arena when a shadow flew over them before falling on them, Astrid specifically. She burst out laughing, rolling on the ground while Stormfly licked her happily.

"That's my girl, I'm glad to see you, I missed flying with you sooo much! Let me stand, stop my girl, let me stand, here, oh gods you were crushing me! Ugh you have a terrible breath for a girl!"

Hiccup couldn't help laughing when she got up, dripping of a smelly slime. Astrid frowned, and with a machiavellian grin, she leapt above him and began rubbing herself against him, thus sharing the viscous saliva. Hiccup had a hard time getting away from her.

"Astrid! You know I have that meeting later! I can't go there all viscous and smelling like a dead fish!" he protested, choking with laugh.

Toothless sniffed him, and turned away with a disgust smirk.

"Oooh, sure, just snob me, you who has the drool the most stinking of Berk!" Hiccup told him, rolling his eyes.

Without even looking at him, Toothless waved his tail that squawked the legs of the young Viking who found himself on the ground. Astrid gave him a brilliant smile and held out his hand to help him recover. When they arrived in the arena, their friends stopped their activities to look at them from head to foot, their eyebrows raised with interrogation.

"You just get out of your bath and you forget to dry yourself?" asked Fishlegs.

"According to the smell, I would rather say that they have rolled in the drool of a dragon!" said Ruffnut, wrinkling up her nose with disgust.

"They still smell better than you, sis'!" remarked Tuffnut, casually.

His sister hit him with her foot. They were soon rolling on the ground, fighting and grunting.

"Don't you have a meeting this morning?" asked Fishlegs.

Hiccup shrugged with a smile.

"I'll join Gobber later!"

"You know, if you want to retire, I can take your place!" said Snotlout, puffing his chest with pride.

Astrid rolled her eyes, and began to pick up a seat.

Two years ago, Hiccup had struggled to get to his new role, the

succession had been so rough that he had hardly had time to step back about his new place as a chief, to think about it and to deal with all this. She remembered how lost he looked after the battle, when he was greeted and acclaimed, she remembered as he didn't let go of her hand, she remembered when he finally fall apart, while leading her to her home, how he was sobbing hard, his head hidden in her neck.

But Val and Gobber were there to assist him in this heavy task, which he took very much to heart.

"Thank you, Snotlout, but no thank you!" Hiccup said, climbing on Toothless.

Snotlout opened his mouth to reply, but he was interrupted by a cry of pure joy.

"Here we go!" Astrid screamed, rising into the air at high speed.

The wind in her hair, she closed her eyes and enjoyed the sensation of freedom which came with flying. Hiccup followed her and joined her quickly in the sky. Their friends and dragons became quickly tiny moving dots.

Astrid burst out laughing and raised her arms to the sky. Hiccup loved to see her so happy, so free. Two years after the battle with Drago, they began to fully enjoy their happiness, as if the shadow of their enemy faded with time.

"Ok, Toothless, let do the show!"

The dragon purred with delight and began to dive in picket while Hiccup, with a manoeuvre of his prosthesis, stood and let himself fall in space, in a nearly perfect parallel to the path of the dragon. Harold let out a howl of joy by extending the arm to stabilize his fall. He felt so light, as if his body was just a feather, no more prosthesis, he was flying and it was wonderful.

Toothless recovered horizontally and at a few meters from the sea, Harold took back his position on his back, Toothless touched the first waves before rising to the heavens, where Astrid and Stormfly swirled and slalomed happily between the clouds.

"I'll race you to the arena!" Astrid suggested.

Hiccup had a delighted smile.

"Fine, it's been a long time since I did have the opportunity to beat you... again... "

Astrid let out an scandalized exclamation and they began to race. Stormfly and Toothless were challenging each other, while their riders encouraged them.

But while Stormfly was charging ahead, Toothless slowed suddenly, and looked frantically around them.

Worried, Harold scanned the surroundings of the look. He patted on the dragon's neck.

"Ok, buddy, what's wrong? What did you see?"

Toothless snorted, Hiccup turned his head and his eyes widened. Off in front of them, where usually the horizon was so smooth that the sky and the sea were sometimes confused, a white wall appeared to be high and advanced on the sea in the direction of the first islands, which were ahead of Berk.

"Astrid! Hold on!"

Alerted, Astrid threw a glance over her shoulder and saw that Toothless and Hiccup had stopped. She followed their eyes and she gasped.

"Stormfly, turn around!" she cried.

The dragon complied and joined Hiccup.

"What is it?" Astrid asked, concerned.

"I don't know, it looks like a snowstormâ€¦ But it's not normal, not that early..."

"It already happened, remember?" she replied, referring to the first weeks of cohabitation with the dragons, when they frightened the cattle so much that there was not milk anymore, or eggs.

"Not so soon, not when the first snowstorms used to come three months laterâ€¦ We have to alert the village!"

### 3. Chapter 3

**\*\*Hi everyone! Good morning or good afternoon or good night!  
:D\*\***

**\*\*How are you doing? Thank you again for your support, your reviews are precious and I feel so happy to read them! (many times, it cheers me up!)\*\***

**\*\*Sorry for the mistakes in my fictions (Harold is the French name for Hiccup, what a shame, I love Hiccup!), translating isn't that easy, added with the fact that I usually do it on the evening, I'm so tired that my eyes try to sleep without me! You know, work, kids, and all that stuff! Exhausting, really!\*\***

**\*\*Anyway, I promise to try harder to translate without any mistake!\*\***

**\*\*Thank you again, I hope you'll enjoy that chapter just as much as I enjoyed writing it! Give me your impressions!\*\***

**\*\*ENJOY & READ & REVIEW!\*\***

**\*\*Have a nice day (or night for me!)\*\***

**\*\*Ps: Greenshade, your name is very beautiful, I love it!  
\*\***



**\*\*xxx\*\***

The man stroked mechanically the sharpened blade of his axe, walking in a dark corridor, dimly lit by lanterns whose dithering flames were struggling to guide his steps. It didn't bother him, he was used to head in all possible conditions, especially since he had lost an eye, now hidden behind a bright red band, edged with the rest of his outfit, which was black, dirty, and worn. His blazing red hair was braided and he was wearing a metal dented helmet with solid horns. The man who guided him led him up to a large circular room at the middle of which burned a fire. He saw a massive silhouette across the hearth. The figure moved to be partially illuminated by the fire.

"Are you Boromir?" the mysterious figure asked, with a deep, guttural, and both squeaky voice.

"And you are?"

The silhouette took a step aside, getting out of the shadow. Boromir kept a straight face. His long life as a mercenary had made him impervious to all sorts of things. The vision of a man as big and damaged as that one was just one of these things. His face seemed partially burned, covered with scars, and his body disappeared under a fragrant and thick dragon skin.

"I am the one who will pay you more than of reason, once you have accomplished your mission..."

Boromir couldn't help but have a satisfied smile. He had no home, no family, he belonged to a group of men, who, like him, were only looking for one thing: a few battles, blood and money. Their loyalty was to who held the purse strings. He minded neither what the backers' motives were, nor who were their victims.

The man began to pace slowly.

"You see, Boromir, some time ago now, I was at the head of an army, say, special... An army of dragons..."

Boromir didn't blink. The dragons were common in this part of the ocean, he wasn't surprised.

"It took years to build that army... The dragons stole my life, I was stooling theirs back, you know, tit for tat... I was about to conquer the world, but a man got in my way... This man annihilated everything, took everything from me... He took me everything that was giving a meaning to my life... But what this man forgets, is that I never forget. A man who had lost everything never forgetsâ€|

His voice was cold and sharp. The man swept what surrounded him with a wave of his hand.

"I managed to rebuild an army from nothing, but I did it, although this army is ridiculous next to the one I had... If I asked for you today, Boromir the mercenary, it's because you're going to help me to get my revenge, he took everything from me, my turn to take everything from him..."

He turned to face the mercenary.

"This man is a Viking from Berk, he has a gift with the dragons, they obey him, they follow him, he conquered an extremely rare and valuable dragon that became the new alpha, and it's impossible to smite them... They are as one, invincible, but this man has also a weakness..."

"He loves a woman" said Boromir, smiling with lust.

"He doesâ€|" confirmed the man."This man loves a woman named Astrid, his wife... Bring her to me... But don't underestimate her, she's a warrior... I want her... Alive... This man is ready to do anything to save her, he'll give me the throne of Berk, and he'll give up his dragons... Bring her to me... I swear he's going to suffer just like I didâ€| And you will have your goldâ€|"

Boromir nodded, then bowed his head and walked out. A mission was waiting for him.

Ooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo

"Something is wrong..." Hiccup muttered for the umpteenth time, throwing another look from the window of the great Hall, where all the people of Berk was gathered.

Astrid, their daughter in arms, stood by him.

"Hiccup, people are asking questions..." she said in a low voice.

It's been hours since the alert, and since the inhabitants had taken refuge in the great Hall, but nothing was happening. The white wall seemed immobile in the distance, as if he had suddenly stopped his run. The storm seemed more and more unlikely, and more time passed, more men and dragons were getting impatient.

"I knowâ€|" he sighed.

"What are you thinking about?"

"I'm wondering about that storm, and why it doesn't move anymoreâ€|"

"Wellâ€| Storms don't stop" she said.

Hiccup nodded.

"I think I'll go see what's going on, he finally declared , moving away from the window.

Astrid followed him.

"I'll come with you!"

He turned to face her.

"No, you have to stay here, I need you for Berkâ€|"

"Your mother can take care of everything!" replied Astrid, narrowing her eyes. "Besides, you can need me!"

Hiccup took her by her shoulders.

"I need you here" he said firmly.

And before that Astrid had any time to get angry, he added softly, watching their daughter.

"She needs youâ€¦"

The little girl was looking around her, watched what was happening with her big wise eyes, heedless of the tension prevailing in the room. Astrid groaned with irritation and dismay. It was unfair to use their daughter to keep her away from the actionâ€¦

"Hiccup, that's unfair, and you know it, don't dare you use our daughter to make me a housewife!" groaned Astrid

Hiccup couldn't help but smile.

"Astrid, you know perfectly that it's not about keeping you at home, she needs you, that's a fact, you know you would be coming with me otherwise!"

He couldn't tell her that he was glad to know her safe, she could try to cut his only foot with her axe if she knew about his concerns for her safety.

"She needs you too..." she finally sighed.

"I'll come back, I'll just see if there's no danger before telling people to go back to their home... I'll take Fishlegs and Snotloutk with me..."

Astrid sighed, resigned, and tightened her grip on her daughter, as if her touch was keeping her from freaking out.

"Okay, fine, but I can't promise you that you'll find the twins safe and soundâ€¦ Ruffnut doesn't stop from complaining about how much she misses her fiancÃ©â€¦ I don't think I'll be able to bear all of this for too long"

"Come on, she's just in love!"

"I'm in love too, and I'm not acting as if someone died each time you're not with me!" she replied.

"You are in love? Lucky guy, do I know him?" he asked playfully.

Astrid punched his arm.

"Oh you probably know him, she said with a grin, he's the most clumsy and strange Viking in Berk and surely all the North!"

"Hey!" he protested with a fake scandalized tune.

"He speaks moving his shoulders and his hands in a weird way, and he always gets himself in troubleâ€¦"

"Not always! And it's not my fault if troubles seem to love me!"

"And he's completely crazy when it comes to dragons!"

"And he loves you so much that it sometimes scares him" he said softly.

Astrid stared at him, her mouth ajar, before grabbing him by the collar of his shirt, driving his head to hers and kissing him deeply.

"You can be so cute sometimes, it's annoying" she whispered. "And I'm still going to kill Ruffnut"

Hiccup rolled his eyes.

"Eret will be back tomorrow, then you'll have to support her chatter about how wonderful he is!" He said with a laugh.

He wrapped his arms around her waist and kissed her hungrily.

"Be careful" Astrid muttered, before kissing him again.

"I'm with Toothless, nothing can happen to me"

"Well, a lot of things use to happen to you when you're with Toothless!" she replied.

He snorted and leaned to his daughter to kiss her forehead.

"Take care of your mum, little baby dragon" he said with affection.

"And you, he said looking at Astrid, trust your husband, I am the chief, that means something!" he retorted Hiccup, puffing his chest.

Astrid couldn't help but laugh despite the anxiety she felt slyly infiltrating her. She hated to stay behind, it was so rare, she was so used to just share everything with Hiccup. That was why when she was a teenager, she said she would never marry anyone. She refused to become one of those women staying at home cooking, engendering, while the man was going to fight and to work. Of course, all Viking women were warriors, but she refused to play the game of the devoted wife. Until she fell in love. Until he went secretly ask her hand to her parents before proposing her, as they were flying side by side like every day. It was the first time that she had almost fall from Stormfly without any attack.

He had been romantic. This word usually drew her chills and gave her nausea, she hated the sentimental and preferred direct and simple things, without frills.

But he was there, with his incredibly nice and naive and dazzling smile, his hair in the wind, his green eyes shining in the light of dusk, the ring in his trembling hand. And even if she already was deeply in love with him, she had fallen in love again... No, Astrid refused to be a housewife, but she didn't regret having married Hiccup, not for a second

On Toothless, Hiccup looked at the ground going away below them. It was strange to leave only with Fishlegs and Snotlout. He was already missing Astrid, it was quite ridiculous, wasn't it?

He used to share everything with her, she was always by his side, supporting him, helping him, pushing himâ€¦ He probably wouldn't be here if it wasn't for her, and Toothless of course. He felt almost naked without herâ€¦

But even if he felt ashamed about it, he couldn't deny the small satisfaction he felt at the idea of her being safe. He didn't know when he did become ridiculously overprotective, but what he knew, it was that he should be discreetly, at the risk of undergoing her wrath. She hated being mothered, and she was taking any measure to protect her as an affront. He could already hear her voice. "How dare you Hiccup, don't you think I can protect myself you stupid muttonhead! Do you want to taste my axe so that I show you if I'm able to fight or not!".

"I don't know about you, but I am not reassured at all!" Fishlegs cried with a plaintive voice.

Snotlout heaved a mocking exclamation and Harold could refrain from rolling his eyes.

His friends tended to behave like the teenagers they were not anymore.

"Keep an eye out!" Hiccup exclaimed, cutting short to a replica of Snotlout.

The sky was covered with thick clouds travelling around them, alternating between lights and shadows, a show that Harold would have appreciated if his attention was not focused on the mysterious white wall approaching at high speed. Toothless began to growl with concern but not stopped his advance.

"On the name of Thorâ€¦ It isâ€¦" Hiccup whispered, his eyes wide with surprise as the wall became more visible.

Toothless responded with a furious growl. Something was wrong... The air was fresher, almost polar.

"It looksâ€¦ Like iceâ€¦" Fishlegs said.

A huge wall of ice was the horizon, offering its sharpened peaks to the clouds, the light reflecting on it over the course of the clouds. The last time they had seen those kind of arrows of ice climbing skyward was two years ago... Hiccup swallowed hard, embracing some look the landscape which extended before him. The wall was several meters long, the sea was frozen one side, giving the ice a greenish hue.

"Look... It looks like a shot of that big dragon Toothless kicked the ass of" Snotlout said hesitantly, as if he feared that the mere mention of the ice breathing dragon would make him appear.

Hiccup frowned. He didn't like it. This wall of ice was nothing natural, but what was the purpose of the responsible. Could it be that there were others Bewilderbeast?

Toothless groaned even more, Hiccup leaned and placed a hand on his neck, tapping gently.

"It's okay buddy, we're going to look for any clue about what's happening here, and then we'll go home!"

The dragon let out a plaintive moan but let Hiccup drive him.

"We must find any clue, anything that could help us to know who did this and why!"

His friends nodded and they began to search.

Ooo

Astrid was stamping. Her hands itched, with an irresistible desire to grasp her axe and to jump on the back of Stormfly to join Hiccup, just like she used to do.

She sighed and looked at her daughter, who was the most beautiful of the consolations imaginable. This little perfect human being Hiccup and she had created by their love. She hugged her and breathed in full nose the smell of her newborn. She could never be bored of this smell, there was something visceral in the scent of her soft skin, something that she acknowledged, a primary instinct that could make her recognize her child even with eyes closed.

Hiccup was gone for several hours now, people were chatting, calling out to one another, singing, children chasing laughingly, the twins were hidden behind a group and threw bowls of mutton full of water at Gustav, who was eying furiously around him. Everything seemed normal.

So, when the warning horn sounded in the village, she took few seconds to realize what was that sound and its meaning. Suddenly she was standing, everybody seemed frozen with shock and stupor, all their eyes were looking toward the outside. The door opened to large flock, and a man came, panting, his eyes darting soon on Astrid.

"We! We are attacked!"

It shook them immediately. Men and a few women came out immediately, armed, while other women remained to care for children and elderly people in the Great Hall. Years of war with the dragons had given them some practice. The twins were already out with their dragon.

"Astrid! There are ships and men accosted!" Ruffnut cried.

"Go! Go!" Astrid yelled.

They complied with happy grins and soon, she could hear detonations. She ran to her mother and put her daughter in her arms.

"Astrid, what!"

"I'm the chief's wife, I have to go! Mom, stay here take care of her,

I'll be back!"

Her mother swallowed her protests and nodded. Astrid rushed to a wall to unhook an axe and rushed outside. She ran breathless until the view allows her to see the Cove. Three boats were docked, and a tide of armed men descended, spreading like a plague in the streets of the village. She heard cries, sounds of fighting, here and there, and small fires had been triggered. The apocalypse was shot dead on Berk. A familiar cry drew his attention, and unthinkingly, she climbed on Stormfly.

"Come on girl, let's go!"

The dragon didn't need to be asked and rose into the air to fire at sight on the attackers. The twins were in action at her left, causing explosion on explosion, yet the enemy seemed to multiply without end. The Vikings fought bravely, but Astrid didn't need any calculation to understand that they were outnumbered, even helped by their dragons, the damage would be considerable. Her heart missed a beat when she noticed two men running towards the Great Hall. Her daughter... An icy fear froze her inside...

"Oh Gods, no! Stormfly!" she screamed loudly.

She jumped to the ground and took the head of her dragon in her hands to look at her in the eyes.

"Stormfly, go to the Great Hall, you have to protect the baby! All right?"

The dragon grunted with discontent and seethed with concern. Astrid firmly maintained her head in her head.

"Stormfly, you have to protect my daughter, at any price! Stormfly, please, protect her! Look after her!"

Stormfly seemed torn at the idea of abandoning her partner, but she obeyed and arose in the air to stop the men with a single shot and she positioned herself in front of the doors.

Astrid turned to face the battle. She felt the adrenaline flowing in her veins, she heard her heart beat dully in her ears and her temples. With a cry of fury, she darted into battle. She knew that she was further weakened by the delivery of her child, she knew that she had not yet recovered her forces, but she had no choice. She would defend Berk and its people whatever it takes. She had no time to identify the enemy, to ask questions.

The fight was an endless chaos. She reeled, shooting down her axe without mercy on the attackers, she saw from the corner of the eye the dragons standing in the way to a new stream of men, she spied Gobber make good use of the hook, and she almost expected to see Stoick arise and roar mingling with the battle. The laughter of the twins almost dominated the battle, repeated explosions triggered their hilarity, but if Astrid had always been confident in battle, for the first time, she felt that the party was not won. Men seemed to focus on her, but she had no time to wonder why, if she started thinking, she would be at their mercy, being guided by her instincts had always been salutary in combat.

"Here! Catch her, alive!" yelled an unknown voice.

Astrid saw that the twins had noticed her delicate position and tried to approach her but dozens and dozens of men blocked their passage, slowing their advance. Astrid was a distinguished warrior, it had been proven more than once and was as valiant as her fellow men. But when she was trapped against a wall and isolated from the rest of the Vikings, she knew that she wouldn't win this one.

However, it was out of the question to give up. Hiccup would be proud of her, she would die in hero. The pain in her leg was sudden. Vivid, violent, overwhelming. She collapsed with a cry, and, a knee to the ground, suffocated while everything seemed to pitch around her. Vaguely, she saw a man come forward and when he took her chin in his hand to raise her head, she could not help him but spit on his face. The man had an amused sneer.

"You are probably Astridâ€¦ So it was true, you are as valuable as beautiful..."

"What do you want?" she snapped, getting free of his hand.

"You'll know early enough, Astrid Hofferson."

She didn't live the kick to come, pain was brief before the universe in front of her eyes was veil of black.

Ooo

"Hiccup, what's that?" asked Snotlout, frowning.

"You spotted something?" asked Hiccup with hope.

They were looking for at least two hours, along the wall of ice, hoping to find a clue, in vain.

"No, I'm talking about that soundâ€¦ Listenâ€¦"

Hiccup remained still and listened. He motioned to Fishlegs to be quiet, all of them retained their breath. A distant sound came to them. A sound they knew only too well. Harold paled and felt her blood froze in his veins.

"By the beard of Odin, it is the alarm!" cried Fishlegs.

They had no need to talk together. All three moved away from the wall at breakneck speed.

"Toothless, faster, faster!" urged Hiccup.

It was as if his heart sank into his own body and drown. He was breathing, and yet he had the impression to be lacking oxygen. Astrid... Their daughter... It was the only thing he could think about.

"Hiccup, look!"

He had seen it. Black smoke that rose from Berk. How could he be so stupid, why had he left to go explore this wall, why had he left his



village without protection! Dragons provided protection, and they were not much, but the latest events, two years previously, had demonstrated that sometimes, an armada of dragons was not enough against a large-scale assault. Thoughts crowded in his mind. And if the ice wall was a decoy, bait to keep away them, Toothless and him?"

"By Thor!"

For the first time, Snotlout and Fishlegs seemed speechless.

The village offered a spectacle of desolation. Several houses had been destroyed by a fire, that the Vikings were trying to master. The fight had been violent judging by the stigma that was wearing Berk.

"What happened!" cried Fishlegs,

Harold was unable to pronounce a single word. A ball of anxiety obstructed his throat. \_By all the gods, please, they have to be okay, they have to be okay, they have to be okay...\_

Toothless landed before the Great Hall, the only intact building, Hiccup leapt to the ground and ran up through the doors, the dragon on his heels.

"Astrid! Astrid!"

The great Hall was empty, he flip-flops and climbed on Toothless.

"Take me home buddy, quick!"

Toothless didn't need to be told twice, a few seconds later Hiccup leaped into his house.

"Astrid! Astrid! Where are you?"

He felt that he was touching hysteria, he felt the panic taking the control, but it was stronger than him.

He had to see her, he needed to see them... The house was cold and empty, only silence answered him. He rushed outside.

"Does someone see Astrid? Where is my wife? Tell me where is my wife?" He cried. He knew that people were staring but he didn't mind, he was used to be the weird one.

"Hiccup" said softly Gobber, placing a hand on his shoulder. Hiccup, terrified by the fact that he seemed about to tell him the unbearable, stepped back shaking his head.

"No, where is she, tell me, tell me!"

He saw then Astrid's mother coming toward him, and nearly collapsing from relief by noting that their daughter was in the arms of her grandmother. Behind her came Stormfly. Without Astrid. The ground seemed to collapse under his feet. The dragon was rough, grumbled, upset, releasing panicked shouts. Toothless rushed towards her, and then stroked her snout with his ones. Hiccup looked at the sad looks

and compassionate whispers, without understanding them. Then he saw, the pain and concern in his stepmother's eyes.

"Where is Astrid" he said again, in a whisper, leaning on the wall of his house.

He relives his nightmare. The house in flames, her cries.

"They took her" said Gobber.

Hiccup collapsed to his knees, wide-eyed with grief and horror. Astrid...

#### 4. Chapter 4

**\*\*Hi everyone!\*\***

**\*\*First of all, THANK YOU SOOOO MUCH! You are just amazing, each review is just amazing, I'm so glad to have you as readers! Vika, Fault, Lattia, sapphire roz, Jo, UnbreakableWarrior, thank you for taking the time to click on that button to let a review, it means the world to me! Every time I have a mail telling me I have a review, it makes my day! \*\***

**\*\*I'm quite proud of me for updating tonight, you know why? Because I hurt my right hand pretty badly, so I feel like a real Viking for finishing the translation tonight and updating! :D\*\***

**\*\*I hope you'll enjoy this chapter, I enjoyed writing it! I can't wait to watch season 3 of HTTYD and the third movie is just too far away, so thank you fanfiction for making the wait more bearable!\*\***

**\*\*Don't forgetâ€¦| READ & ENJOY & REVIEW!\*\***

**\*\*Have a nice day/night\*\***

**\*\*XXX\*\***

"Where are the twins?"

"They have followed the kidnappers..."

"But who are they? And what do they want to Astrid?"

The voices rang out around him, but he couldn't focus on them. The great Hall was packed, he was vaguely aware that they were expected something from him, but he didn't know what. Eyebrows frowned, his jaw tightened, he was staring at the central fireplace. He had the impression that his world was always turning dramatically, perhaps was he cursed? Each time anyone uttered the name of Astrid, he felt overwhelmed by a new wave of desperation and a devastating rage. No matter who they were, he would find them and he would charge them hundredfold.

He had always maintained that revenge was the architect of the war, but if he had to go through it to find Astrid, then he would. He clenched his fists. He wasn't there when it happened, he was not there to protect her, he had failed in his duty first to his wedding

vows, protecting her, as strong and tough as she might be, it was his role to watch over her. He knew that for years, she was the one who was mostly watching over him, but times had changed. And knowing her in the hands of unknown barbarians made him sick. If they touched her, if they dare just brush her, he knew that nothing would be able to stop him. One hand rested on his shoulder.

"It's going to be okay, son, Astrid is stronger than most of the men here, she will stand firm and we'll bring her back home" said Gobber.

Hiccup looked up. He saw the mother of Astrid standing, head straight, to his right. He saw his daughter, sleeping in her arms. She wouldn't grow up without her mother, he wouldn't let that happen. He knew only too well what it was to grow up without one of his parents, and even if most of the time, he was happy, he would ensure that his daughter may not grow without her mother. He viscerally loved his child, a deep and true love that transcended everything, but he wasn't sure to survive the grief that would cause the disappearance of Astrid. This single thought made him sick, he felt a lump in his throat and he swallowed with difficulty.

He tried to chase the thoughts about what could happen to Astrid, he would become crazy pain otherwise. The conversation fell silent one by one and soon, attention was turned towards him. He stood up, both hands firmly placed on the table and scanned the Berkians, his people.

"People of Berk... We have suffered an attack of unprecedented violence... Astrid Haddock-Hofferson has been taken, my wife was kidnaped by these warriors... "

He was again forced to swallow and he blinked to chase away the tears that threatened to spill over. A leader didn't cry... At least not in front of his people.

He vainly tried to control the tremors in his voice.

"I don't know who they are, or what are their motives, but what I know is that I will find them, I will bring back Astrid, and they will pay... Even if that's the last thing I do in my life."

A murmur of assent ran through the assembly.

"I need volunteers... There is much to do to rebuild Berk, and I need men to watch over the island..."

Immediately, a tide of hand stood while exclamations rang out.

"We'll bring back our chief!"

"Astrid is one of ours!"

"We don't leave anyone behind!"

Hiccup felt a huge wave of affection for all of them, they were stubborn, violent, but unconditionally loyal and selfless... They were certainly bounded, brutal for most, but they were standing together, and their soul were noble...He had never been as proud to

belong to Berk as right now.

"We are all with you, son" said gently Gobber.

"Just tell us what you need", said Val, with concern in her voice. She loved Astrid as her own daughter, and she knew that if she lost one of them, she would lose both, they were so bound togetherâ€|

Hiccup, unable to speak, nodded gratefully. He didn't know where to start, the ocean was wide, he had no idea the direction they had taken, and everything was so confusing. She could be anywhere, and to imagine her alone, disarmed, delivered to these men... He abruptly closed his eyes and tried to calm his breathing. Toothless purred, passing his head under the arm of the young Viking, who smiled weakly before this attempt to comfort him.

In a huge bang, the double door of the great Hall opened and the twins rushed inside. Hiccup opened his eyes wide, feeling the hope reborn.

"Hiccup!"

They stopped, out of breath, and Hiccup had to resist the urge to shake them so they finally say what they had found.

"The... ship... island..." gasped Tuffnut, hands on his knees.

"I don't understand, what ship, what island!" exclaimed Hiccup with irritation. His concern was driving him crazy, it was difficult for him to have any coherent thought.

"Weâ€| We followed them... It was my idea..." said Ruffnut.

"It was my idea you stupid!" replied Tuffnut.

Ruffnut kicked his brother, who fell over backwards. Hiccup felt his patience melt like snow in the sun0, Toothless, feeling him tense, began to growl to Tuffnut.

"All right, all right, they are heading towards the peninsula of Gardenbug..."

Hiccup didn't take time to think, he thanked them and without waiting, he climbed onto the back of Toothless.

"Wait, son, you may need helm!" said his mother.

"It's okay mum, take care of Berk, I'll be back as soon as I find Astridâ€|"

His mother looked at him with sad eyes.

"I'm sorry sonâ€| I should have protected her, Iâ€|"

Hiccup cut her, shaking his head.

"No mum, don't blame yourself, you were already fighting, Iâ€| I'll bring her backâ€|"

Valka took his hand and squeezed it with a smile full of love and pride.

"Sure you will! Be safe son!"

Hiccup nodded and Toothless darted above the crowd to soar by the doors remained open.

He was barely aware that the twins, Fishlegs and Snotlout had followed him and flew by his side. Frowning, he couldn't think about anything else than Astrid, saving her no matter what would happen. He had heard of the peninsula of Gardenbug but he couldn't remember under what circumstances and in what terms. Who were these men, why had they taken Astrid from him? He grinded his teeth. This fear of losing her wasn't new, he always had to deal with it, but especially since their wedding. Until then, their relationship had been rather discreet, but since their engagement, all had become more public, less private, and one evening where he was thinking about his future life, he was surprised to doubt. Not about his feelings for her, he had always loved her, she was his world, his heart, he belonged to her since the day he understood what was love.

Marrying Astrid, making her the wife of the heir of Berk, putting her in such a dangerous position, it was like walking in a crowd of pirates with written on his forehead "this is my weakness!"

Of course, he hadn't told Astrid about his concerns, calling her a weakness was the best way to take her fist in the face, or worse...

Yet she was, she was his weakness, and he considered for a moment to cancel everything, to keep her safe, away from all of that, to ensure her security. And then there was this day when the mechanism that let him fly jammed, and opened too late, Toothless caught him in time, when he was about to crash on the rocks. He had seen death very closely, but this time, he was fully awake, and he had been very afraid. Then, he had a revelation. The death could be anywhere. He would marry Astrid, he would be happy, he would vow to protect her from any harm. And he would honor his vows.

Ooo

Astrid kept her eyes closed. She was waking up, but instinctively, she didn't try to open her eyes. Something was wrong and it was better to put off the track.

She was confused, where was she? She couldn't smell burnt wood from Berk, but an iodine damp smell. She was lying on a wet floor and couldn't help but shudder. And after the light swing that she felt, she had to be on a boat. She felt her hands tied. Painfully tied. She felt lighter, she had been searched and got rid of the ballast by all her weapons, even the most secret. Her heart missed a beat. She was in a bad position. In a very bad position. She tried to calm the panic she felt swelling in her chest and focused on a single thought. Hiccup. He would find her, she was convinced that he would save her, she had an unshakeable faith in him. He had always saved her, protected her, despite all that she could tell him about her abilities of protecting herself. She couldn't remember what happened after being trapped against a house, except of fighting with

everything she had, trying to hit the maximum of people until being hurtâ€¦

Barely had she thought about her injury that she felt the pain fit and she had to bite her tongue to stay still. She tried to think about anything else, she thought about her daughter, her beautiful daughter, her tiny daughter, safe at home, at least she hoped so. She didn't know what the men wanted from her, but she knew one thing, she wanted to see her daughter grow up.

"... girl... market... viking..."

Snatches of voices were heard and she handed the ear while they were getting closer.

"That's the market, he will never agree..."

"I don't care his motives, all I want is our money... And she may bring us lots of money!"

Astrid felt icy fear running through her veins. Would they sell her? Like an object? Give her up for money? To whom? And who was this "he"? She wouldn't let anyone sell it as a vulgar sheep, she wouldn't let anyone besmirch her honor, she would rather die. She moaned from pain when one of them suddenly lifted her by her hair.

"Well well, what do we have, it looks like the Queen of Berk is awake!"

He relieved her unceremoniously, Astrid pulled away and stepped back, glaring at them with anger. Two men, arms crossed, stared at her with an amused sneer. One of them was big and imposing, he had short black hair, and his face was crossed with a long reddish scar running from his black eye to his imposing Chin. The other, which seemed to be the chief, had long bright red hair, braided, wearing a viking helmet, one of his eyes was concealed behind a red banner.

"Welcome aboard Astrid Hofferson..." he said.

"Haddock" she replied in an icy tone.

"My apology, your Majesty, Astrid Haddock" he mocked.

"What do you want from me?"

"Me? Nothing, really, don't take it personally, but as pretty as you are, the wife of a one legged man is not of great interest..."

Astrid could have exploded, the barely concealed insult to Hiccup upset her.

When she was a child, then a teenager, she had always hated when others mocked him, feigning indifference but never participating. But now, any note on Hiccup's disability made her getting mad. She always wanted to scream at everyone how much he was strong, and smart and brave and brilliant, loving, generous, and how he was beautiful, tall, thin, muscular, even if not as chunky as other Vikings, and every night in his arms was like an overview of the Valhalla...

"Hiccup will find you, she said between her teeth, he will find you and will put you on your knees..."

The two men exchanged a look and burst out laughing.

"The master of dragons isn't a threat, a hobbled on a big lizard, not a big deal"

She could not believe her ears. She felt her heart beat faster, she felt her hands tremble, claiming an axe as fast as possible. They were either completely unconscious, either directly coming from the Hells.

"Don't look so offended, dragons are only a tiny part of what is hiding our world!"

Mercenaries. It was obvious. Their posting was that of men more scared by the lack of gold than by death itself. She frowned.

"It seems that your Hiccup had offended our sponsor..."

"Who is he?"

"Tsss, we are professionals, we don't give any name..."

One of the men, the brown one, approached her. Wide-eyed, she stepped back up to be trapped by a wall. The man had an evil smile and he stroked her cheek with the back of his hand, she withdrew with a look of hatred.

"We have to admit he has good taste in women, but such a beauty deserves a worthy lover" he said putting a finger on her lips.

She reacted automatically by biting it until she felt the metallic taste of blood in her mouth. He let out a roar and stepped back holding his bloody finger. While his companion broke out laughing, he smacked her with a monumental force that sent her against the wall. She fell backwards, groggy.

"You're a real Viking! But you're not match for us!"

"Untie me, we'll see" said Astrid in a threatening tone by raising her head, despite the nagging pain radiating from her bruised cheek.

"I would like to see it, but you see, you are a commodity that has a price, and we have to be sure that you're not damaged, at least not too much..."

"Your dear Hiccup will come yes, to watch you die... He will run to his loss..."

"No!" she whispered with despair.

They left and Astrid raised her knees to support her head. She looked around her, she was in what was no doubt the release of the boat, there were barrels full of marinated herring, fish and dried yak probably. She tried to assimilate everything that had happened. They had kidnapped her for a mysterious man who hoped to reach Hiccup by

taking her. Dragur? Drago? Anyways, he was right, Hiccup would rush in the trap, regardless his own safety, as he always did as soon as one of his relatives was concerned. She closed her eyes and retained a moan of despair. She had no way to act, no weapons, no dragons, her hands tied... Her chances to escape by herself were thin.

The contempt of the mercenaries for Hiccup had stirred up anger she felt still bubbling in her veins. Idiots, they didn't know what they were talking about, they didn't know all of Hiccup, all of what he had gone through. She remembered the first time that she had realized that his amputated leg did sometimes hurt. She had come to his home, while Stoick was gone for a few days with men to bring supplies for the coming winter.

She had knocked but nobody had responded. Concerned, she entered to find the room downstairs empty. She had held her breath and had gone upstairs, surprised not to see Toothless come to meet her. Once on the floor, she saw his messy auburn hair exceed of his bed. He was sat on the floor and she could see that Toothless was lying next to him. She heard Hiccup moaning and decided to come forward.

Toothless lifted his head and she would have sworn she saw an air of relief in the eyes of the night fury. In a bond, he was at her side and pushing her with urgency to the bed with a plaintive purr.

"Toothless, buddy... Where are you going?" asked Hiccup without turning his head.

Astrid had then bypassed the bed and he had lifted his head towards her. Several feelings passed on his face. The surprise, fear, shame, anger, pain, humiliation. He was sitting, leaning on his bed, his legs extended before him, his prosthesis lying alongside him, holding an ice bag against the stump of his amputated leg.

"As... Astrid, he said in a hoarse voice, once the shock passed, you should go, please, I'd like to be alone..."

He avoided her eyes and his hands shaking. She didn't hesitate.

"I'm not going anywhere" she stated.

She sat next to him and had laid a hand on his that held the ice bag. Then she looked at him in the eyes. His large green eyes, terrified, full of doubt.

"Let me help you" she said gently pushing his hand to take the ice bag.

The stump was red and swollen, but the scar was still closed and clean. She had never seen his leg without his prosthesis, he always avoided to swim with others. She tried to contain her own emotions, she wanted to cry, to hug him and never let him go, but she knew that he would interpret it as pity and that it would be worse for him.

Then she had kept a straight face and was attempting to apply the pocket of ice on the irritated skin gently. He was tense, and held his breath. She thought about what would do her mother in this case, then she began to croon a lullaby she used to like when she was much



younger, remaining focused on what she was doing. She felt him relax.

"Does It happen often?" she asked, finally lifting her eyes towards him.

He was still avoiding her eyes, and he shrugged.

"It's only been two yearsâ€¦" he replied.

"This is not my question..."

He remained silent, his eyes staring at nothing, and Astrid didn't leave him the eye. He finally looked at her.

"The pain is there permanentlyâ€¦" he said in a whisper.

Astrid felt a ball clogging her throat. He was suffering like this for two years? How had she not realized?

"There are better days than others, he added hastily when he saw the confusion on the face of his girlfriend. Gothi gave me a lotion to apply, and ice helps too, Gobber said that within a year, I'll feel almost nothing..."

Astrid swallowed. He was the one suffering but he still was trying to reassure her.

He was the most incredible man she knew, he was brave, had a courage without equal, with an incredible kindness... She had the impression of falling in love again... She leaned toward him and put her lips on his.

"Huâ€¦ What's that for?" he asked, the air slightly groggy.

"Because I love you" she simply replied.

She surprised herself. She hated to put words on her feelings, when he had confessed his feelings for the first time, she had put him a shot in the belly before kissing him, whispering that she also loved him and running away.

He smiled, she had reached out to the bottle containing the ointment, and his smile had faded.

"Look, Astrid, listen, you don't have to do that, really..."

He was rubbing his neck with embarrassment.

"I want to..."

His eyes widened. Without a Word, she had removed the ice bag, then she had coated her hands of the lotion before applying on the stump to massage it gently. Harold was livid, his jaw tight, his eyes fixed on his disabled leg.

"I'm sorry..."she whispered, aware that he was suffering in silence.

"I'm the one sorryâ€¦" he mumbled.

She had looked at him with surprise.

"What are you sorry about?"

He sighed and showed his amputated leg.

"About that I... I know that this is hideous... I would like to be normal... You deserve someone healthy"

His voice was lost in a whisper. Astrid had hesitated between hit him or shout at him, or kiss him breathless. Instead she had glared at him.

"Hiccup... You are the the most extraordinary person I know... Look at me..."

He had lifted his tired eyes to her.

"I love you, and I feel incredibly lucky to know you and to be loved by you... Hiccup, I don't want to ever hear you say such things, you are the Conqueror of Dragons, you are the heir of Berk, you are Hiccup, the man who has been able to face a whole island to be heard, the man who was able to make Vikings and Dragons cohabite and more, love each other... Hiccup, do you even realize what you have accomplished? You have done more than a generation of leaders in centuries did! Besides, do you realize how attractive you are, how I had to threaten Greta Evanson so she stops trying to flirt with you? This"

She had showed his stump.

"It belongs to you, it's a part of you, it's a scar that just shows how brave you are Don't be a part of your leg, let it be a part of you, make strength from it And don't let the other girls seduce you!" she said with a half smile.

"It is the dragon's effect" he had mumbled, his cheeks red.

Astrid had put a slap on the back of his head.

"Oy!" he protested.

"You are attractive, you're handsome, and don't make me say it again, you know how much I think you're good looking, this is already pretty embarrassing!"

He had a hesitant, then more candid smile. And Astrid had felt her heart miss a beat.

She opened her eyes. Yes, she was in a very bad position, but yes, Hiccup was brave, and no matter what thought these barbarians, he would come and get her out of there.

## 5. Chapter 5

\*\*Hi everyone! A new chapter just for you, yeah I know I'm amazing (kidding!), seriously, I hope you'll enjoy it! I'll try to update before leaving for holidays (yaaaaaaaaaay)\*\*

**\*\*Take care of you!\*\***

**\*\*READ ENJOY AND REVIEW! (please, a little tiny review)\*\***

**\*\*XXX\*\***

The icy wind was whistling in his ears, his fingers were numb and he felt that his eyelashes were increasingly frozen, but Hiccup didn't care. He felt like the anger was burning him, as if his blood was boiling, and he wouldn't have been surprised to be on fire just like a Monstrous Nightmare. His eyes were frantically scouring the ocean that scrolled under him, looking for the slightest indication of any trace of a boat. After the testimonies, three enormous ships had docked at the South of the island, as he was in the North inspecting the ice wall. He was sure now, this wall was not there by chance, it was a diversion intended to keep him away from Berk.

But why, why so many men, why Astrid? These men obviously knew that dragons were the defense of Berk, and they knew that Astrid was his wife. It wasn't a secret of course, several nearby islands had sent emissaries to congratulate the new leader and newly-weds, but neighboring peoples were their friends, allies, even if their relations were rare, they were cordial and peaceful. Then who had planned this attack? Who wanted to hurt him by taking from him the most important person in his life? He thought about their daughter, hopefully, they didn't know about her and she was safe for now.

Toothless, feeling the tension of his rider, snarled with concern. Hiccup stroked him with a forced smile.

"It's okay buddy, we'll find her... "

He lifted his head and spoke to the twins.

"Did you notice something about these men, or their boats had a particular sign? A flag? An emblem?"

Tuffnut was thinking deeply, trying to remember something, but Ruffnut exclaimed:

"Yeah! There was a blue flag!"

Her brother pushed her.

"No idiot, it was red!"

"Blue, I'm going to punch your ugly face!"

"We have the same face you moron! It was red, not blue!"

"You are going to have some blue on your stupid face!"

"STOP!" yelled Hiccup, breathing deeply, trying to stay calm, We didn't have any time for that!

The twins seemed sorry and looked sheepishly at him. Hiccup sighed.

"Do you remember anything else?"

"A bear!" exclaimed Ruffnut, raising her hand with triumph.

Hiccup frowned without understanding.

"There was a bear on the flags" added Tuffnut. A huge bear, like really huge!"

"A bear?"

Hiccup reviewed all emblems and blazons he knew, there were wolves, eagles, falcons, ferocious felines, but a bear?

It didn't remind him of anythingâ€¦

"Here!" cried Fishlegs, pointing his finger towards the water.

In the distance, several tiny dots were moving towards the horizon.

"Stay in height!" cried Hiccup to his companions. We have to stay out of sight!"

His heart was beating so hard that he wouldn't have been surprised to see it jumping out of his chest. They had to remain out of sight, if they were the kidnappers, they could try to capture them or worse, to harm Astrid. More they approached, more they were convinced that they were the abductor. Three boats, under full sail, to that land that was already on the horizon. The peninsula...

"It's them!" exclaimed Hiccup, seeing the vague silhouette of a bear on the flag...

"Soâ€¦. What are we waiting for?" said Snotlout with a fierce tone.

"We have to be sure that Astrid is on one of these boats, and that they can't hurt her! I won't take any risks!"

He knew nothing of this new enemy, could not predict their reaction if they came to realize that they were followed by dragons riders of Berk. If Astrid was on one of the boats, the time to find her, the worst could happen, he couldn't allow thatâ€¦

Toothless grunted with frustration, as echoing what was experiencing his rider.

"I know buddy, I know, I want to get her out of there..." said Hiccup in a low voice.

To see those ships, knowing Astrid was probably right there, and doing nothing, was physically painful. Astrid could be tortured or worse at this very moment, she could be living the worst atrocities and he was there, in the sky, completely useless. The feeling of helplessness left a bitter taste in his mouth, and brought him back to the terrible nightmare he had done a few days before. Astrid was his best friend, his confidante, his pillar, she was always there to support him, to push him, to confront him, the unwavering faith she

had in him had forged his own confidence, she made him better. They were inseparable for so many years, imagining a life without her beside him was inconceivable, and losing her would undoubtedly be the worst thing that could happen to him. He missed her, it was visceral, he needed to see her, to make sure she was okay.

"We are going to get her out of there!" said Snotlout.

Hiccup looked at his cousin with surprise. Snotlout wasn't really the king of empathy and comfort, yet he had to do it, with a terribly embarrassed air and an almost comical expression on his face, but still. However, as for good measure, he snickered in adding.

"It would be better for you, without her, you are as lost as a baby!"

Hiccup rolled his eyes but had a small smile. Then an idea came to him, he frowned, before turning to his friends.

"We are going to split up, Fishlegs, the twins, you keep following the boats, be careful to stay out of sight! Snotlout and I are going ahead to the port on the peninsula!"

"huh... Are you sure?" asked Fishlegs, gazing at the boats with apprehension, as if he feared that they began to fly and spit fire.

Hiccup nodded with determination.

"We'll be there in a handful of minutes, while they still have to sail for two hours at least, that leaves us the time to land out of sight and to position ourselves!"

"Okay, and so, what is your plan?"

Hiccup shook his head.

"I don't know, the priority is to find Astrid and to get her out of there without putting her in danger, so we'll see there...Snotlout, here we go!"

Toothless didn't need to be told twice, he climbed high in the clouds and crashed at full speed once Hiccup had activated the mechanism of his tail.

Hiccup couldn't define himself as overprotective. Astrid had always been part of all their adventures, she had always followed him, and he had never done anything to dissuade her, happy to know her close to him. The danger was part of their life as Vikings, and the idea of preventing her from bumping headlong into the action didn't even come in his mind...

Fine, it wasn't quite true if he rethought both when she had wanted to avenge the honour of her family... But considering his own past as a warrior, he was probably the most misplaced to worry, Astrid had always been more comfortable than him in close combat. Of course, he had been dying from fear more than once, he had always done everything to protect her, without her knowing sometimes, but he realized that more the time passed, more he was unable to see her endanger herself. Which was quite ironic, considering the fact that

he couldn't help but endanger himself. Toothless purred without slowing down his pace.

Hiccup was always amazed to see how his dragon and him were bonded, how Toothless was sensitive to his feelings, his moods, how they knew each other by heart. He often had the impression to have entire conversations just by looks, gestures. Toothless was gifted with an unmatched intelligence, and sometimes, Hiccup couldn't still believe his luck.

"Astrid, hang on, I beg you, hang on, I'm coming..." he whispered, closing his eyes briefly.

When he reopened them, a peninsula stretched under them, and when he saw the port and the steep road that deviated twisting between fjords, everything came back to him. It was Johann who had told him about the peninsula, which was a landmark of bandits in any kind, but also an outpost of the city of Sliesthrop, a merchant counter where pirates sold captives as slaves to destination of kingdoms located further south. Countertop authorities ignored the abuses of the pirates and in exchange, they ensured that they were provided regularly in merchandises, including human beings...

But why Astrid? Why not abducting several people if it was for money? The twins argued that their attackers were targeting Astrid and had left Berk as soon as she had been in their hands...

"We're going to land on this building!" said Hiccup, pointing at a damaged building that dominated the port.

There was only a boat on the spot, and few people outdoors.

"It's our lucky day" said sarcastically Hiccup, "We must be discreet!"

"Hookfang and I are always discrete!" retorted Snotlout.

Toothless groaned, defying the dragon to react as abruptly as he usually did whenever Snotlout spoke about him. The dragon seemed to understand the message, it was not the time to send Snotlout through the air.

"Now!"

The dragons flew in a circle at high altitude to descend in piquet on the roof of the building, landing smoothly to avoid attracting attention. Hiccup and Snotlout let themselves slide without a sound and flattened themselves on the roof to have a full view of the port.

Sailors were coming and going, they could hear fatty laughter, of uncertain voices of tipsy men and the sounds of broken glass.

"This place is very welcoming..." muttered Hiccup.

To imagine Astrid in such a place made him sick. But he was there and he would do everything to wrest her from the hands of these pirates.

"We have to wait now" blew Hiccup, fixing the

horizon.

Ooo

Astrid woke up when she heard voices and sailors rushed steps resound on the bridge above her. She had no idea of how long she had been captured, but they were certainly getting to where they were going. She sat down, not without difficulty, her leg was extremely painful, she twisted to try to see the back of her thigh, where she was hurt, but it was impossible.

However, on this dirty floor dirty and without any cares, she knew that she could die of infection within a few days. She tried to swallow but her throat was dry, her head painful, her breast seemed about to explode, accustomed to feed her daughter. She closed her eyes and tried to visualize some big green eyes of two people who meant the world to her. Her daughter, her pink cheeks, her little face so touching, her small fists constantly in action...

And Hiccup, who always looked like a lost puppy and at the same time a fearless warrior. Hiccup and his wide dreamy smile, Hiccup and his invaluable soul. She recalled the precise moment when she had fallen in love with him. She had confronted him while they came back from the nest of dragons, and he had stood up to her, to protect Toothless. She had always been curious about him, he was so different from the others, smart, probably too smart for his own good. But this time, there was this gleam in his eyes, that new determination in him, this courage that she had always suspected, and she had the impression to be thrown into a precipice, she stared at him for a few seconds, her heart beating faster than ever, the world seemed to be erased, she only saw him...

Steps shook her from her memories. She sat up, eyes blinking and threatening, ready to defend herself, whatever it took. A man entered, the red head, who seemed to be the leader. He grabbed her arm and he put her up.

"We arrive. You will soon have all the answers to your questions, you must be happy! "

Astrid grinded her teeth but didn't respond to his taunts, and let herself be lead towards the bridge. The staircase, made slippery by sea spray, was a real torture for her injured leg, but the man didn't seem to bother, pulling her strongly whenever she staggered or stumbled. When they led in the open air, she had to close her eyes, light suddenly blinding her. Bright and cold air whipped up her face and she breathed loudly the iodized air. As the man drew her behind him, she heard the gravelly remarks of his men and felt her blood start bubbling.

When she felt hands on her, she jumped up and faced a man with a toothless vicious smile.

"Touch me again and you're dead!" she cried in struggling.

"How fierce she is, Princess you have to be worth it in bed!" he said, laughing hard, causing the hilarity.

"Don't touch the merchandize" said the man, pulling her to him bluntly.

He pushed her, then two men, including the brown one with the scar, who flanked her and followed their chief, holding her each by an arm.

"You need two men to control a woman!" she said, with a mocking tone.

"You can laugh, as long as you can still do it" breathed the brown man, leaning toward her ear.

Astrid had nausea feeling his warm breath on her neck, and she withdrew as far as she could. They went down the boat and her eyes went wide. She had arrived in hell. Or in any case which was akin to hell. Only one other ship was anchored in the bay, in addition to the three ships that had arrived. Men came and went, few in number but with a terrifying vision of the worst of humanity. Violence, alcohol, everything was sordid and scary.

She then noticed a group away, and opened large round eyes. Men and women were chained to each other, standing, and seeing them slightly dressed made her bless her clothes and boots, all stuffed. What surprised her the most, was that these men and women were different, she had never seen anyone like them. They had very dark skin, sometimes even black!

Never in Viking land she saw people with this color of skin! She saw them shivering but they kept their head high, with an almost princely air despite the heavy chains hampering them. Her gaze briefly crossed the eyes of a young woman, who probably had her age. Her large black eyes were so expressive than for a few seconds, Astrid remained frozen, it was as if she was asking her for help.

"Let's go, Princess, you are expected!" growled one of the men, hustling her.

She had to look away and advance with reluctance. Where was Hiccup? Had he returned safe and sound from his exploration? Was he aware? She had a pinch in the heart by imagining the concern that he would feel... And Stormfly would probably be freaking out. Astrid suddenly lifted her head and looked frantically around her. She would have been unable to explain it, but she felt someone was looking at her, but curiously, not maliciously. She looked towards the group of slaves, but the young woman was staring at the ground.

And all around, there was only hostile people. Baffled, she advanced to one of the houses. The red man knocked with his fist on the door, which was opened moments later on a man armed to the teeth. Without a word, he withdrew and let them pass. Astrid looked around her, the room was circular and focused around a central fireplace, as any viking house.

Initially, she didn't see anything. She wondered what the men were waiting for, she felt strangely her hairs standing up with fear.

"We have her!" the red head finally announced.

A noise drew her attention towards the bottom of the room, plunged into darkness. She narrowed her eyes while a massive shadow straightened to come to them. She felt her heart freeze. Astrid was



only rarely afraid, but at this moment, she felt as if she was watching a ghost. Hiccup had told her that he was probably still alive, that nothing was played, but if she shared his concerns, it was another story to see them materialize in front of her. Drago Bluvist.

"I knew that I had done well to appeal to you, Boromir the mercenary" Drago said with satisfaction, while the flickering glow of the flames made his face covered with scars more scarier than ever.

"You were right, Drago, this woman is a warrior..."

Drago burst into a laugh without joy.

"Beautiful, vibrating, intrepid Astrid... Do you know how long I expect this time?"

He approached her, Boromir withdrew, but the two men maintained her still. She looked at Drago with a fierce undisguised hostility.

"You won't get anything from us!" she said, delighted to see that her voice wasn't shaking despite the dread that this man inspired in her.

Again, he burst out laughing.

"I already have what I wanted... You see, my original plan was simply to slice your throat under the eyes of your dear master of Dragons..."

Her eyes widened with horror despite of her.

"I'd like to be there to see it" whispered the brown guy with the scar, in her ear, walking his finger across her throat.

"But eventually, pursued Drago, I told myself that it would be too simple... After all, once dead, no one can hurt you anymore, and make him go mad with pain..."

Astrid had never felt such hatred for anyone. She had never felt so a urge to harm, such a violent need to hit, to kill... This despicable man had only one aim, make Hiccup suffer, and she couldn't allow that...

"Why are you doing all this? You know that Hiccup will get me out of there and he'll send you where your place is, in hell!"

They broke out all laugh. Drago shook his head with a bad sneer then looked around him, in feigning fear.

"By all gods, Hiccup would be here? Ah, well, he isn't..."

She felt her jaw becoming strained, and her fists tighten.

"Pretty Astrid, you are very entertaining... You know where are we? We are on the outpost of Sliethrop, which is several days from here..."

This town sound familiar, she knew that Johann resupplied sometimes out there.

"There is, in a distant country further south, where glaciers don't exist, a man of power who collect rare things, and it would seem that this man loves the female charms from elsewhere..."

Astrid had the impression that any force was draining from her legs. She was like paralyzed with shock as Drago continued with delight.

"What this man is going to do with you, beautiful Astrid, you'll regret not to be dead, this man had signed a pact with demons, it is said there that he rapes and tortures his victims until the point of insanity..."

She had to be strong, she wouldn't let herself crack, not in front of him, not in front of them, Hiccup was going to save her, as he had always done. She trusted him with her life, she wouldn't give them the satisfaction of seeing her falling apart. Any color had deserted her face. Drago was right on one point. She would rather die than being touched by anyone but Hiccup.

## 6. Chapter 6

\*\*Hi everyone! You are amazing, all of you, your reviews are such a joy for me that I think I'm reviewholic now! So you'll have to give me as many reviews as you can to keep me in a good mood! \*\*

\*\*I'm glad to post this chapter, and I can't wait to translate the next, so that you'll be at the same point as my francophone readers! I'm doing my best to update before I leave for holidays, but if I fail, forgive me, okay?\*\*

\*\*So enjoy and don't forget, REVIEWS!\*\*

\*\*(and remember, if there are a few mistakes, I'm French :D)  
)\*\*

\*\*XXX\*\*

She was there. Alive. Relief swept by waves, \_she was alive, she was alive, she was alive\_. Her frail silhouette was flanked by two behemoths, one leaned toward her ear to whisper something. He saw her jump and stray away, and he clenched his fists, with a violent urge to pounce on this brute. They had their chances after all, the twins and Fishlegs were on a nearby building and were waiting for his signal. Except that it wasn't a trivial operation, Astrid was their hostage, to any alert, they could harm her, and he wouldn't risk her life. They led her unceremoniously, he saw her limping, and he felt his heart miss a beat. She was injured? Did she get hurt during the attack? The twins had mentioned nothing like it... Or did they hurt her on the boat? What did they do to her?

He beat back the unbearable images that inundated his mind, he had to focus and be ready to take the first opportunity to pull her out of there.

He saw her stop, then she look hastily around her. He wanted to show her his presence, to make her understand that she wasn't alone, that he was right here, that he would never abandon her, he hoped, deep

down inside, that she felt his presence. Then the men handed her with brutality, he saw her stagger and felt his short nails dig into his flesh as he squeezed his fists tighter. However, she kept her head high, and followed them without showing any sign of the fear she probably felt. They disappeared inside a house and Hiccup straightened.

"I'm goingâ€¦" he announced.

Snotlout looked at him as if a second head had pushed on his shoulders.

"You're going? Where the hell are you going? Are you crazy? You don't stand a chance! They just have three boats full of armed men, oh yeah, not a big deal for the Dragon Rider!" he exclaimed, shaking his head in disbelief.

"I'll be discreet, they don't know me, and I'll leave Toothless with Hookfang and you..."

The dragon and Snotlout snarled unhappily. Hiccup tenderly patted his dragon's head, looking at him in the eyes.

"I have to go, I want to see what is happening and where is Astrid, you gotta stay here but I'll be back with her... I promise buddyâ€¦"

Snotlout sniffed with skepticism but Hiccup royally ignored him. Toothless groaned plaintively, Hiccup smiled to him, a smile more confident than he was in reality, then he turned away and let himself slip gently along the roof before stand at the edge and then let him slip along an old gutter that seemed ready to fall at every opportunity.

He had never been that happy not to be as chunky as his Viking comrades. He landed silently on the uneven ground, and then he limped to the alley, close to the walls, his senses on alert. He saw a burlap sack on the ground, he took it, placed it on his shoulder, and went in the alley, a part of his face obscured by the bag. Adrenaline was pulsing in his blood, making the beats of his heart almost frantic.

The house was isolated in a deserted alley, hackers didn't pay him any attention, too drunk for some of them, just indifferent for the others, and he kept a low profile, remaining in the shadows, then sneaked into the alley. He threw a glance over his shoulder and slipped up to the wooden door which he stuck his ear on, and he listened carefully to the conversation that took place inside. His eyes widened. That voice... Memories flashed in his mind, Drago and his demented screams, Drago ordering Toothless to kill his rider, his father, dead, Drago on Toothless...

He swallowed. How could he have been so silly, he knew that Drago wasn't dead, he used to warn the Berkians about that, they had increased patrols and remained on their guard for two years. Obviously that Drago Bludvist would try again. Obviously that he would attempt to attack him on his weak point as he considered Hiccup as his personal enemyâ€¦

He put the burlap sack down, and listened again.

"His initial plan was simply to slice your throat under the eyes of your dear master of Dragons..."

Hiccup swallowed with difficulty while an ice sweat covered him. If she died, he died, it was an established certainty for so many years that it seemed to be obvious. He wouldn't let them.

"But eventually, pursued Drago, I told myself that it would be too simple... After all, once dead, no one can hurt you anymore, and make him go mad with pain..."

He clenched his fists again. The madness of Drago had no limits, he barely dared to imagine what he planned to do to Astrid. And the very idea that he could touch her, make her suffer, drove him literally crazy.

"Why are you doing all this? You know that Hiccup will get me out of there and he'll send you where your place is, in hell!"

Hiccup closed his eyes, hearing her voice was a relief, hearing the faith she had in him gave him an unexpected feeling of power, which seemed to act as a cold shower. He had to act, he couldn't longer wait, there was only a single wall between them, and he couldn't wait more.

He knew that at least, with a single cry from him, Toothless would land with their friends following close, so he should risk everything. He withdrew from the door and by-passed the house, hoping to find a back door, with reason. He again heard snippets of voices, among which he recognized that of Drago.

"What this man is going to do with you, beautiful Astrid, you'll regret not to be dead, this man had signed a pact with demons, it is said there that he rapes and tortures his victims until the point of insanity..."

Hiccup felt his blood freeze. Who and what was he talking about? If anyone touched Astrid... He drew his sword, suddenly opened the door and stepped into the room. The men turned to him with a surprised look, only the face of Drago remained in the shadows. Astrid held her breath, her large blue eyes wide with fear on her pale face. He looked at her quickly from head to toe, checking that she was whole and alive. Then he turned his gaze to the most massive silhouette. Drago chuckled and walked to the fire, showing his destroyed face.

"Master of Dragons, I was not hoping your company that soon!"

"Let her go!" coldly retorted Hiccup.

The two men who were holding Astrid had an amused sneer and one of them came out a dagger that he put on her throat. Astrid bit her lip to not moan of fear, she closed her eyes, trying to regain her composure and to tame the contact of the hard and icy blade on her throat. She was a Hofferson, she refused to let fear take control. She was Astrid Hofferson, she was Astrid Haddock, a fearless Viking.

"No! Let her go!" cried Hiccup, his face twisted with fear.

Astrid reopened her eyes and planted them firmly in his.

"Hiccupâ€¦ Everything will be okay..."

The blade leaned a bit more and Astrid felt that the slightest movement could be fatal. But she didn't flinch, barely daring to swallow her saliva, but remaining as impassive as possible despite the fact that any color has abandoned her face.

"What do you want Drago? Just tell me and I'll give you what you wantâ€¦ Justâ€¦ Just let her goâ€¦"

Drago had a smile that made them shiver. A predatory smile, a smile that was devoid of any humanity.

"What I want, master of Dragons, it's to destroy you..."

Hiccup lowered his guard and dropped his sword to the ground in a smashing noise that sounded long in the room.

"So here I am, release her, you want me, not her, it's between you and meâ€¦"

"Hiccup, no!" Astrid exclaimed, staring at him with horror.

He offered her a weak smile.

"Everything will be okay, Astrid..."

She felt her eyes burn with tears that she was struggling to contain.

"Always that taste for sacrifice, son of Berk, you take that after your father, don't you? Look where that led him..."

Astrid, horrified, wanted to wrestle, but the blade against her throat slashed slightly her skin. She ignored the pain and began to yell.

"You son of hell, you're a monster, you are a coward!"

Hiccup was pale and trembling with contained rage. How dare this man speak of his father while he was responsible for his death? How dare he continue to go to the people he loved? He didn't have an explosive temper, but he understood, at the price of the sacrifice of his father, that the road to peace wasn't always devoid of suffering.

"My father is a hero, and he taught me that a leader protects his own, at any price..." He said in a calm voice. He would not let Drago the satisfaction of seeing how upset he was.

Drago burst out laughing.

"They are only speeches, the most stupid that is! Your father died Harold, by your fault, and she's going to have a fate worse than death, all by your fault!" he screamed in designating Astrid.

"You are the one responsible, Drago... Let her go, and do to me what

you want..."

"You didn't come with your dragon?"

Hiccup frowned, and pursed his lips.

"I came alone..."

"You two, go search the port, his friends should not be far away!" ordered Drago to two men who came out immediately.

Then Draco approached Astrid and grabbed her by the hair. She remained silent, begging Hiccup of the gaze. He had to flee, he had to escape, he had the duty to stay alive...

"Don't touch her! " Hiccup cried, his throat suddenly dry and his heart-pounding dully in his ears.

"How would you react if I kill her right here, under your eyes..."

"Let her go" said Hiccup, his jaw was clenched, his eyes were terrified and he was livid. "Let her go, she's out of thatâ€¦ Please, let her go, take me..."

Astrid felt her heart tighten, he had never had this pleading voice, not even many years ago when his father had refused to listen to him before going looking for the nest of dragons. Never had he seemed as vulnerable as at this very moment, her eyes filled with fright going from Astrid to Drago's face.

"Answer to my question!" screamed Drago by tightening his grip.

Astrid grimaced but didn't make a sound.

"I... I can't lose her... I'd rather die..."

His voice was no more than a whisper. Astrid looked at him with a begging look, he couldn't sacrifice himself, she refused.

"Hiccup... Berk needs its leader, everyone there need you..." she pleaded.

He knew that she thought primarily about their daughter

"I'm nothing if you're no longer in this world..." retorted Hiccup, his throat knotted, his voice hoarse.

Astrid shook her head while several tears rolled down her cheeks. She sought to wrestle, if only she could reach an axe, a sword, anything that would allow her to fight, to show them that she wasn't a damsel in distress, to knock them to the ground, to keep them from making Hiccup suffer more than he already did, he had already lost far too muchâ€¦

"She'll stay alive, announced Drago, pushing Astrid in the arms of the two mercenaries. She will be enslaved and will suffer the worst torture, in a land so far away that you had to have never heard about it... And I'll be there to watch you sink into madness, and the world

will belong to me, I 'll free all peoples from the yoke of the dragons, I'll destroy this species and I'll be adored by all!"

Astrid was white like a sheet and was suddenly uncontrollably shaking in terror, as if her body rioted, too terrified to obey her wish of remaining calm. Hiccup had the impression that his heart would break.

"I won't let you..."

"And what are you going to do about that? You are you, the sickly son of a deceased leader and we are an armada..."

"Why are you doing all this? You could stop this right now, we could be in peace!"

"We already had this conversation, dear, dragons had destroyed my life, I will destroy theirs... And you, you made a mistake, you came and put across my path by annihilating my plans, so I'll destroy you, and what better plan than to take the most important person in your life from you! You'll know what it's like to lose everything, dear Hiccup, just like me, just like I lost everything, and you'll beg me to take your life..."

Hiccup felt tears of despair burning his eyes. What chance did they have against a whole army, away from Berk and the others dragons, besides that Drago had certainly new dragons and the former Alpha was probably somewhere nearby. He had to find a solution, and quickly. But he had no time.

"Take her!" shouted Drago to the mercenaries who began to pull Astrid to the door.

"NO!" yelled Hiccup, rushing forward, "No! Toothless!"

It took a few seconds just to make the dragon explode the door, projecting Astrid and men on the ground. Toothless rushed indoors growling, followed by the twins on Barf and Belsh. Hiccup began to rush to Astrid, lying half unconscious, rung by the explosion, in the middle of the debris from the door. But a mercenary got in his way, while the second seized Astrid and rushed outside with her in his arms, covered by a stream of pirates and mercenaries who rushed into the house, weapons raised.

"No! No, Astrid!" screamed Hiccup, jumping on the back of Toothless, who rushed out in the open air.

Fishlegs and Snotlout were fighting with their dragons outside, detonations resounded on all sides, and Hiccup was able to hear the shouts of joy of the twins from the inside, there was smoke which stood on all sides, causing a mist covering the port, the yelling and detonations made the scene more surreal. They were five, plus their dragons, against at least two hundred armed men, yet they seemed to have the advantage, dodging nets and other traps to dragons, burning the surroundings with warriors shouting...

Drago seemed to have evaporated, but Hiccup didn't have to look for him. He led Toothless to the port at the same time as Drago raised his arm, urging a shout to freeze his blood. But while he was

expecting to see the Leviathan emerging from the depths of the ocean, it was a huge shadow that rained down on the peninsula.

A dragon to colossal proportions appeared as arriving straight from the clouds. Its thick skin, covered with smooth, sharp, scales was so dark that his red eyes stood out as two embers on the night. The dragon opened his mouth, revealing teeth long like arms, sharp as the sharpest swords, and issued a roar that made the walls shake, and unsettled the others dragons for a few seconds. Hiccup noticed something on the back of this dragon, which he knew nothing about, it was like a small house, attached to the back by links that were pressed in the breastplate of the dragon with so huge nails that they probably were the size of his fist.

He realized with horror that they had nailed the links in the skin of the dragon. But even if he felt sorry for the dragon, he had to act, Drago was followed by the mercenary who had Astrid, and they were headed to one of the ends of the port.

"Toothless, here we go!"

The night fury didn't need to be told twice, with a roar, he rushed to Drago, which turned briefly to smile with satisfaction. He raised his arm.

"Toothless!"

In a spin, he avoided the tail-flick, as the giant dragon thumped him. What Hiccup didn't notice, it was that this dragon, in addition to possessing four wings, had two tails, and while Hiccup and Toothless were dodging the first attempt, they saw the second far too late, and soon they found themselves thrown against the floor.

Hiccup had the impression that the world was spinning around him, he couldn't move anymore, he eventually stood up, reeling, and began to cough, hampered by the thick smoke that seemed to have besieged the city. His eyes began to water while he was trying to move, frantically searching in the dark fog that surrounded him.

"Toothless! Where are you Toothless?!"

He heard the characteristic hum of his dragon and walked toward him, tending his hands forward until he met a hot and rough surface.

"Toothless! It's me buddy! We have to follow them and get Astrid out from there!" he cried, climbing on the dragon.

Toothless flapped wings, rose on a few meters before collapsing and crashing on the port. Hiccup, distraught, leaned toward his dragon.

"Toothless, buddy, what's wrong?"

He felt the panic coming, enclosing his chest. Every second lost kept him away from Astrid... Toothless let out a plaintive moan and lifted its tail. Hiccup's eyes widened in horror. The mechanism that allowed Toothless to fly was broken. Irreparable, without his forge nearby.



They were stuck on the ground.

"No..." Hiccup muttered, looking up to the sky. The smoke was somewhat dissipated, he saw then the gigantic dragon, on which was perched Drago, the red head mercenary, and Astrid, who was awakened and struggled.

"Say goodbye, master of dragons! This is the last time that you see her!" screamed Drago. "As for us, we will meet soon and I'll enjoy the spectacle of your downfall!"

He yelled madly, and the dragon began to flap his wings, causing a wind which chased the remains of smoke.

"Hiccup!" Astrid shouted, desperate, before being driven to the cabin which stood on the back of the creature.

"No!"

Hiccup leapt from Toothless and began to run without leaving her eyes.

"Astrid! Astrid! I'll find you! I swear!"

He saw Snotlout coming toward him.

"Snotlout! We have to follow them! Toothless can't fly!"

He began to climb on the back of the monstrous nightmare, but they were all three projected into the air by a fireball that exploded at the feet of Hookfang. The dragon had difficulty to recover and the huge dragon rose at breakneck speed. Hiccup seemed paralyzed, his big green eyes staring with pain, horror, grief, fixed on the point that disappeared into the clouds without being able to stop it.

He was within an inch of saving her. Everything had gone so wrong, she was in their hands, promised to a barely describable destiny. He felt his stomach twist, he had nausea, the thought of losing Astrid made him sick, he wasn't able to think coherently anymore, to reflect, he knew he should keep his composure, for the good of all, but he was not more than anger and grief.

Fishlegs and the twins finally appeared and landed with their friends.

"What's going on? Where is Astrid?" Fishlegs asked, looking around him.

When he saw Toothless moaning by looking at the sky with sad eyes, his tail mutilated, when he saw the mask of despair that was painted on Hiccup's face, he understood.

"Oh..."

The twins, Snotlout and he exchanged a brief look.

"Hiccup! We have to go back to Berk! We'll find a way to find Astrid, but we should really really leave..." said Fishlegs, glancing over his shoulder to the pirates who had recovered their spirits and who headed back to them with a menacing air. They had the upper hand,

but very briefly, although materially, they had dealt a hard blow to the armada of mercenaries.

The voice suddenly high perched Varek attracted Hiccup's attention.

"We'll take care of Toothless!" said Ruffnut and Tuffnut.

Toothless let himself caught by the Zippleback, without opposing any resistance.

Hiccup settled behind Snotlout, and all stood to get away as quickly as possible of the peninsula, dodging arrows and other projectiles until being too far away to be reached. Hiccup hadn't said a word, and his friends exchanged worried glances. He seemed lost, he was pale, like about to faint and seemed to be the shadow of himself.

All the words remained stuck in his throat. He didn't know what to say, what to do, he just felt that the gaping hole that was dug instead of his heart seemed to be about to engulf him. How was he supposed to deal with such a grief? Everything was too much, too big, too heavy, too hard. He wanted to close his eyes, forgetting his pain, to sink into a dreamlike world where Astrid would be with him, safe and sound. But he couldn't escape the reality, no more than he could escape his grief.

## 7. Chapter 7

\*\*Hi everyone! I'm very happy to update today, youhouuuu I did it! So now, you're at the same point than my French version! I can leave for holidays in peace! \*\*

\*\*Thank you for your reviews, you are the best readers ever, I feel such a joy reading how my fiction is touching you, how happy you are for my translation, and I'm thrilled when I know that people are reading me from all over the world, it's fantastic!\*\*

\*\*So thank you to each of you! Thank you for your encouragements and for your enthusiasm! Each review makes my day!\*\*

\*\*I'm leaving for a few days, but I take my computer with me, so I'll probably update as soon as I come back!\*\*

\*\*Take care of you!\*\*

\*\*READ ENJOY AND REVIEW!\*\*

\*\*XXX\*\*

Astrid toiled to open her eyes. She felt sick and groggy, she felt as if she had been trampled by a herd of yaks. She remained motionless first, her mobile gaze sweeping which surrounded her. The place was unknown, the walls were made in a material that she couldn't identify, it was smooth, shiny, decorated with mosaics. She closed her eyes and handed her ears. She couldn't hear anything, except distant whispers.

She tried to remember what had happened, how she got there. She

remembered Hiccup rushing in that room, throwing himself head first into the lion's den, she felt again the contact of the cold blade against her throat, and then everything was packed, Toothless, the explosion, then she woke up on the back of a dragon as she had never seen before, headed by Boromir and Drago, she recollected to have struggled, before the mercenary applied a cloth dampened with a product that had made her lose consciousness...

Until now... Then, she noticed something else... She was hot... So hot that she felt sweat drip on her back and on her forehead. She took a deep breath, opened her eyes again and sat up slowly. She had the impression that the room whirled around her. She suddenly heard someone talking, she couldn't understand first, until she realized the person was talking in latin.

"Perfect, you're awake just in time, hurry up, the master will be here any minute, to choose!" roared an unknown voice.

A man, small, bold, and dressed in what looked like a dress, began fidgeting around her while the whispers became more present.

She noticed that she wasn't alone. Several people were sitting in the same room, all visibly coming from different countries. There were the slaves whom she had seen on the peninsula, she recognized the young woman, curled up against a very young man who looked right before him with a proud and fierce gaze, a protective arm passed around her. There were also two red-haired women, just at her side, an adult, the other of a decade, no doubt mother and daughter, then there were a dozen people who appeared to be from the same place, their clothes were similar and they remained together. She also noticed that several guards were positioned around the room, keeping an eye on them. How long had she been unconscious?

She felt suddenly a sweaty hand grip her chin to turn her head. The little man observed her with small pig eyes, before smiling.

"Yes, she's quite awake, the master will be happy!"

Never had she been as happy to have learned latin as now, although it remained rudimentary. In his new role as chief, Hiccup had wanted to learn latin, just in case, and Astrid had then learned it more or less despite herself...

But then, if these people spoke latin... They were surely somewhere in the Roman Empire... She felt her heart pounding loudly in her chest. Was she that far from Berk, from her home, from her family, from Hiccup, from her daughter?

Trumpets resounded outside, and the little man began to jump as if he was on fire, completely panicked.

"The master is here! The master is here! Stand up, stand up you filthy animals!"

Astrid narrowed her eyes and clenched her fists. How dare he call them animals?

He took her by the arm and lifted her bluntly on her feet. She noticed that her wound had been treated, but she had no time to think about it. In reinforcement of drums and trumpets, one delegation made

his entrance into the room while the prisoners lined up, rights, held at gunpoint by the spears of the soldiers. Astrid saw first the little man multiply the bows and smiles, then she saw two men appear. Twins. The same graying hair, the same square jaw and shaved close, the same ride on the forehead, the same piercing eyes, except that if the look of one of them was neutral, the other's seemed burning with dementia which made her shudder...

As soon as she saw his crazy eyes, she knew he was the man Drago was talking about. The man known for his madness and his torture skills.

The only difference between them was their outfits. The scary one was wearing a toga, probably showing the importance of his function, while his brother wore a military uniform, but obviously, one of the brothers ordered, the other obeyed. Their eyes scanned almost simultaneously the row of prisoners before them. Astrid held her breath when their gaze passed over her. The man in the toga had a half vicious smile, while the other frowned, with an indecipherable glow in his eyes.

However, he remained motionless while his brother began surveying the ranks. He stopped before the young woman with ebony skin that Astrid had noticed on the peninsula. She saw her shaking and grabbing the young man beside her. The master, noticing their commitment, smiled, and beckoned a soldier who rushed to seize her. She began to howl in clinging to his companion, who struggled to push away the soldier. Two other soldiers intervened then, one held him still while the other hit him repeatedly, until he collapsed to the ground, unconscious. The young woman then ceased to howl, her large bright eyes full of tears fixed on her motionless companion. She let them led her without opposing any resistance this time.

The man seemed delighted by this show and Astrid felt a violent desire to punch his face until erasing his sadistic smile. This man was a monster who fed on the suffering of others. No one seemed to be moved, even the other prisoners watched their feet, as if their own suffering exceeded them already too much so that they couldn't worry about others.

Then, he chose a young man and two young women, before stopping in front of the mother and her daughter. The young girl stepped back, shaking with fear, against her mother, the man leaned and he stroked her cheek with an air of lust who gave to Astrid the urge to scream, to throw up, to cry. She shivered with disgust, but when he wanted to beckon, his brother made a step forward.

"I take her for me, with the mother" he declared.

His voice was raised, and he looked at his brother right in the eyes. This last one looked annoyed.

"Are you sure that you can take care of a young flower like this one, Flavius, you seem too wise for that"

"I know what to do" replied his brother without blinking.

The man with the toga sighed with a dramatic air but gave his consent. The mother and the girl seemed both relieved not to be separated and terrified by the fate awaiting them. Then he turned to

Astrid. The young woman maintained his look, observing the madness that seemed there spinning, reminding her of Dagur and his dementia. He looked at her from head to foot with an expression that made her sick.

"I take this one too" The named Flavius said to his brother, who looked at him with disbelief.

"You are hungry today, my dear brother! What's going on? "

Flavius shrugged with a half-smile.

"You told me to have fun, is this not the opportunity?"

"Come on, a Viking! She's priceless, you know how savage they are!"

"Nero, you can have dozens of vikings if you wanted, let her to me..."

"The man thought for a moment and signed with annoyance.

"Well, fine, you can have her, but you have to lend her to me time to other..."

"Of course, brother"

"I am not a commodity!" exclaimed Astrid before she could stop herself.

Silence descended on the Assembly. The other prisoners appeared to be terrified, as if they feared to be affected by the lightning which was going to beat down on her. Soldiers were already threatening her, the little chubby man, silent until now, was as white as a sheet, the man in the toga seemed about to implode. His brother, on the other hand, frowned without leaving anything forthcoming from his emotions.

Astrid found herself on her knees without understanding how, she grimaced in pain, her thigh had maybe been healed, it wasn't cured yet.

"Slave talk only if they have permission!" thundered the small chubby man, before turning to the man in the toga for slurring apology.

"What did she say?" asked the man, ignoring the slave trader.

Flavius, eyebrows always ruffles, replied.

"She wanted to see her family again"

Astrid, amazed, glared at him. He understood very poorly his language, either he came to protect her. The other man burst out laughing.

"They always say that!"

Then, he turned to his brother.

"Well, take her, I would punish her for this intervention, if I were you Flavius..."

Soldiers lifted Astrid and led her out of the room, while the two men continued their market. She had never felt so small Invisible, insignificant, like a forgotten object. To be looked at and treated as she was less than a human being, was beginning to freak her out. She knew yet slavery existed, but between knowledge and experience it

Ooo

Seated on the throne of Berk, Hiccup was listening to people discussing the attitude to have. Astrid's mother proclaimed loud and clear the need to build an army and hunt down Drago, Gobber said he would made as many weapons as necessary if it were to save Astrid, other approving with exclamations that echoed in the large room, the twins screamed, throwing fists at the sky without really following the conversations, and Fishlegs talked about strategy, while Snotlout exclaimed that they should burn everything and ask questions after... Valka listened in silence, diving in deep reflection.

Hiccup looked at the sleeping infant in his arms. She didn't have a name yet, and the full moon was approaching, but he refused to give her a name without Astrid by his side. He felt his heart tighten and he tenderly stroked her soft cheek. The little girl yawned, blinked several times before looking at her father, who smiled at her.

"Hey, hello you sleepyhead... I know you probably wonder what's going on, and where is your mum... I swear I'll bring her back home You know, you belong to the people of Berk, we are stubborn, strong and maybe even a little bit crazy... But we are a family, you will be loved and protected like nowhere else... Your mother and I, we love you, and we will come back... In the meantime, you will stay with your grandmothers, and you're in good hands sweetheart"

Was the Haddock's name cursed? Would he have to raise his child alone, just like his father had to? He couldn't bear the single idea of losing Astrid, they barely had the time to learn how to be parents together, to learn about their daughter It was just so unfair

Toothless purred and rubbed his snout against the girl with a sweetness that he only used with her. Stormfly imitated him, before she whined with sadness. Hiccup stretched his arm towards her to lay his hand on her snout.

"Everything is fine, girl, you did what Astrid asked you to do, you have watched over our daughter and I know that you always care about her, and we are grateful for that..."

The dragon bowed her head. Stormfly was plagued by guilt since the disappearance of Astrid and Valka had used of all her talents to calm her in the immediate aftermath. Hiccup rose and everybody went silent while all eyes turned to him.

"I'm leaving, I'm going to find Astrid... Fishlegs, Snotlout, Tuff, Ruff, you can come with me, if you want to..."

His friends nodded, with a knowing smile. They would follow Hiccup to the end of the world if necessary. Everybody knew that if someone could find Astrid, it would be him. Stormfly straightened but Hiccup stroked her head.

"No girl, not you, I need you here..."

Then he turned to face the assembly.

"By taking Astrid, Drago hopes that it's a sufficient distraction to attack Berk and to take our dragons... Let's show him how wrong he is... I need you all to defend our island, Mom, Gobber, I entrust Berk to you, and... and take care of my daughter..."

Valka nodded and held out her arms to take her granddaughter. Gobber put a hand on his shoulder.

"We'll do as you want, chief... You know, my boy, he would be proud of you..."

Hiccup nodded, a knot in his throat making him voiceless. He swallowed and cleared his throat.

"Do not underestimate Drago, we beat him once, but he is more determined than ever and he controls an extremely powerful dragon which we don't know anything about... We'll find Astrid and we'll be back to defend Berk, no matter what..."

He kissed tenderly his daughter's forehead and came out of the great Hall with the cheers of the inhabitants, followed closely by his friends. He feared his people accused him of cowardice, but they knew that he was the only one who could save Astrid, they didn't doubt anymore his courage and loyalty, and they agreed on one point: nobody was left helpless behind. Each inhabitant was important, and Astrid especially, as Hiccup and her seemed unable to work apart.

"Do you have a plan?" asked Fishlegs anxiously.

Hiccup nodded without slowing his pace. Dozens of thoughts were jostling in his mind. He thought again about his marriage, there were three feast days upon the arrival of winter, as was the tradition. He remembered the ceremony, the wedding night, at the same time full of clumsiness, shyness and burning desire. He remembered every whisper, every noise, every feeling, her soft skin, and the sparkles in her eyes, the way she moaned his name, how it felt when they were one. The next day, he offered a gift to Astrid, according to tradition, a fine chiseled bracelet which he had made himself and from which she didn't part anymore. Their initials were engraved in it, as well as several symbols, flames, dragons, and an axe. She was a warrior after all, she was as brave and tough as any soldier. And she was his.

"Fine, what's your idea?" asked Snotlout impatiently, getting Hiccup out of his thoughts.

He made a stop at the forge, filling his pockets with everything they might need. Then he climbed on the back of Toothless. He knew what he needed. Or who he needed. He needed someone who traveled enough to know who that guy Drago would have sold Astrid to was.

"Trader Johann must be in his way to Berk... He'll help us to find Astrid..."

" Good idea!" Ruffnut said.

"Yeah, good ideaâ€¦| What's the idea actually?" asked Tuffnut.

"I could have had this idea" muttered Snotlout.

Fishlegs made a noise halfway between coughs and laughter.

"I said I could have" cried Snotlout.

"Yeah, but you didn't" replied Fishlegs with a grin.

"Okay guys, let's find Johann!"

It took only a few minutes flight to locate the long-awaited boat. The merchant was waving to them, but he glared at them, stunned, when they landed on the deck with their dragons.

"Oh... Fine, hello my friends, I'm very pleased to see you, I missed my favorite Island, but... Is it safe? My boat is wooden you knowâ€¦| "

He glanced with worry at the dragons, who sniffed the goods with interest. Hiccup leapt from the back of Toothless, and Johann immediately knew something was wrong. Hiccup seemed tense, his jaw was set and he was frowning with concern and anger.

"Master Hiccup, what's going on?"

Hiccup told him briefly about the situation. When he explained his request, Johann's eyes widened.

"Are you sure about what you heard?"

Hiccup nodded. Johann remained a moment silent, as if he was reluctant to speak. Then he sighed.

"There is a man, a Roman of the name of Nero... A very powerful man... This man would have an extensive property on an island off the coast of Rome, in which he would have hundreds of slaves... It's said that this man is crazy and cruel, it is said that sometimes screams can be heard from his home from Rome..."

Hiccup was livid. His friends were exchanging worried glances.

"My friend, if your beloved is there... The gods have mercy upon her soul..."

"I want you to take us there..."

Johann shook his head, stepping back.

"I rarely go that far and I won't go near to this island! This man is crazy..."

"You'll take us to Rome... Johann, I'm asking you as a friend, we need you, I need you, with all my heartâ€¦| We can't take the risk to



go flying with our dragons, I doubt that they would appreciate... Help us, we'll be taken for travelling companions, and once in Rome, we'll find a way to reach this island..."

"Butâ€¦ This man is stark raving mad, and he has a whole army! You run to your loss!"

"I'm not going to give up, I'm going to find Astrid, I can't justâ€¦ justâ€¦ I have to find her!" retorted Hiccup. His tone was full of despair and hurt.

And his friends were as determined as he was. Johann sighed again, resigned.

"Fine... but what are you going to do with your dragons?"

"They'll follow us high in the sky, except for Toothless, who will travel hidden... Thank you Johann, thank you so muchâ€¦"

Johann shrugged.

"I'll have another story to tell! Besides, your father was a great friend, and you saved me more than onceâ€¦ You would do anything for her, wouldn't you?"

"You have no ideaâ€¦"

"I'm still saying it's a suicide mission" muttered the trader, raising his arms to the sky.

But he walked towards the rear of boat and acted so as to make a U-turn. Hiccup looked at the horizon.

"I'm coming, Astridâ€¦"

## 8. Chapter 8

**\*\*Hi guys! I'm back! Yeah, yeah, I know, you missed me, I missed you too! I had a problem with my computer so I couldn't translate until Tuesday! I worked hard, it's 3 A.M and I'm exhausted! Be indulgent please, I tried to translate it as fast as possible, so there are probably some mistakes!\*\***

**\*\*This chapter is quite long, I hope you'll enjoy it just as much as I did!\*\***

**\*\*And thank you so much for the reviews, I love you!\*\***

**\*\*Enjoy and Review!\*\***

**\*\*XXX\*\***

Astrid noticed the fearful glances that people threw her as soon as she put a foot outside. The one behind the other, the slaves were forwarded to walk to the port, through the narrow paved streets of Rome. It was a scorching heat, and she felt her body boiling beneath the thick layers of fur covering her. The sudden brightness was harsh, her eyes and her head hurt, but she didn't slow down. And she saw them, those frightened looks, passers-by who departed as soon as

she arrived at their level. Astrid wasn't stupid, she knew that her people had acquired a reputation as ruthless barbarians, pillagers and murderers. She could explain how the people of Berk were different, how life in the far North abounded with surprises and beauty, but she knew that it would be futile. She was only a barbaric in their eyes, reduced to slavery.

She bit her lip, trying to focus on something else than the sudden whiff of panic which crushed her whenever she thought of her situation. She refused to panic, she refused to lose hope, she would do anything to see Harold, to see their daughter grow up, to come back to them...

But for now, disarmed, she was vulnerable as she hadn't been since her childhood, she had no means of control, and she hated this feeling. Not to mention that she was still groggy, even if what had happened had the effect of a cold shower.

She observed the passers-by, they were so strangely dressed, gowns, draped dresses, shoes that left see their toes, women were all topped with elegance, and those of high society were accompanied by a gaggle of followings. She then saw children playing in the street and who interrupted for watching the slaves with curiosity. A woman, a nurse without doubt, who wore a newborn, called to them and they scrambled. At the sight of the infant, Astrid felt tears rising to her eyes.

She wanted to keep her baby against her, she longed so bad to hold her daughter and breathe her smell, she was so angry with herself, for being trapped by mercenaries, a baby needed his mother, and because of her carelessness, she was separated from her little girl, why didn't she stay away, with the others young mothers? She knew why, because she was the wife of the Chief of Berk, she was alongside the throne of Berk, and she had a duty to protect the island and its inhabitants.

And more importantly, she was Astrid and she had always been a warrior. She turned away her eyes and tried to focus on something else. She noticed then that the young slave of the peninsula was walking next to her, she was shaking from head to foot and seemed on the verge of collapse. Astrid approached her imperceptibly and took her hand, making her jump. She looked at her with big scared eyes and Astrid gave her a smile that she hoped was reassuring despite her own distress.

"Hey... Everything will be fine..."

The young woman kept staring at her, Astrid eyed her for a short time. They were probably the same age, more or less. Obviously, she didn't understand the languages of the North. Astrid then tried to speak Latin.

"You didn't understand what I said? Do you speak Latin?"

The young woman nodded hesitantly. Obviously, the slave trader had ensured that they learn the basics of Latin in order to be immediately employable. The young woman eventually smiled at her. A weak smile, that couldn't hide the distress and the deep sorrow in her gaze.

"My name is Astrid, and what's yours?" Astrid asked.

"Kaleina..."

"Be quiet! Nobody allowed you to speak!" roared a guard pushing brutally Astrid.

She stumbled and clutched her fists. If only she had her axe, she would get away any desire to brutalize anyone from him. Once in port, they embarked on a boat that seemed well frail compared to the long ships to which she was accustomed.

She saw the sea, which extended its quiet and turquoise waters under a bright sun. It was so different from the formidable steel sea surrounding Berk. More calm, but so little familiar that it seemed threatening.

But the crossing was brief, and Astrid couldn't help but admire the island on which she had just set a foot. The sand seemed so soft, that she wanted to grasp a handful to leave it escape between her fingers, and she was almost sure that the water should be as good as a bath. But what left her speechless was the residence.

A gigantic palace made of columns, gilt, sculpture, a profusion of ornaments in unknown materials, for a spectacular result. They immediately took them to the slaves' dormitory, where a man received them. Probably the chief. He looked at them up and down with an evil look and looked disgusted, nervously tapping his leg with a whip wrapped around his wrist. At his side, a terrifying dog, big, black with little nasty eyes, watched them, impassive, but Astrid doubted as it had surely been trained to hunt them in the event of attempted escape.

"Take off your clothes and put those that you'll find inside, and gather you outside!"

He was more screaming than speaking. Astrid followed the others in a sort of hut where straw mats were laid on the dirt floor. Clothes were laid on each mat. Women entered into one of the barracks while the men entered the nearby one. She drew back in a corner, and all changed in silence.

As she undressed, she felt her throat knot. It was as if her clothes were the last thing that still linked her to her Viking life, she felt that by taking them off, she was giving up, renouncing the idea of home, and it made her sick. She put a tunic which unveiled part of her legs, in a rather bland blue.

Over, she had to put a kind of draped dress was completely uncomfortable. She disliked dresses, the only one she had ever worn was her wedding dress, even on the day of her engagement she had remained in her warrior outfit. She looked around her and found no shoes. Was she supposed to walk barefoot? Resigned, she followed the other slaves outside, keeping her clothes rolled into a ball in her arms. The chief led them to a huge fire that was snoring in a stone fireplace around which men bustled. She recognized the sound of beaten metal and felt her heart miss a beat. A forge.

So many memories overwhelmed her. A younger Hiccup, uncertain

teenager whose hands drove a talent unsuspected as soon as he was in his forge, all the times where she had watched him without his knowledge, then stolen kisses, hours spent watching him drawing in his small workshop, the smell of molten metal...

"Throw all your clothes there!" barked the man.

One after the other, they came forth and threw their package in the chimney. When it was her turn, Astrid had the impression that her arms weighed tons. She looked at the flames coming to lick the furs for then moulder them. She knew it was ridiculous, but she felt like she was watching her last chance to go back to Berk go up in smoke.

She advanced then and was guided to the Palace, they entered from the back door, and she almost sighed with relief. It was cool inside, and the contact with the smooth ground was much nicer to her bare feet than the uneven ground the gravel of which dug into her skin. If her hands were covered with calluses, protecting them from everything, by the dint of handle axe and deal with the dragons, her feet, on the other hand, were used to be protected by thick boots fur and were probably one of the most sensitive part of her body. Hiccup used to rub her feet every evening, with a tenderness that made her heart melt... Thinking about him was so hard, she missed him so muchâ€¦|

Two women came to meet them, while the steward took the men.

"Follow me, except of you three!" said one of the women, designating Astrid, the red head woman and her daughter. Astrid saw that the young slave seemed terrified, she tried to smile at her, before following the steps to the second woman. This one seemed far older than her, and looked severe but benevolent. When they were away in a maze of corridors, she turned towards them.

"Fine, you are going to enter the apartments of master Flavius. The master would like to meet you, one after the other, don't forget that you don't have the right to speak without his permission... He likes to have an idea of who serves him, it is very unusual, I know, but you are there to obey, don't forget it, he is your master and has all rights on you, you belong to him..."

Astrid grinded teeth, the woman seemed to notice it and looked at her with disapproval.

"Believe me, your fate is much more enviable than that of your companions..."

She designated a large double door in their right.

"From this door, there are master Nero's apartments... The gods forgive me, but if you have a little bit of common sense, don't approach it, unless being asked... Do you listen to me, if you want to stay safe, stay away from hereâ€¦|"

Astrid frowned, wondering what she was talking about.

"It's strictly forbidden to tell anyone about what you can hear or see from these apartments...You'll work in master Flavius' apartments, but you'll be required to serve during meals and

feastsâ€| "

She led them to the left and they crossed another double door before find themselves in a new area.

"By the way, my name is Lucia, master Flavius sent his orders only to me... I have then the responsibility to make them apply, Master Flavius has very few slaves in his apartments, and it's rare that he can accompany master Nero to the market... So believe me, you are incredibly luckyâ€| Come on, he's waiting for you..."

Astrid felt her heart beat wildly. She felt confused, she didn't know what to expect, but certainly not to be introduced as if she was a guestâ€| But she remained careful. She was aware of the fate that awaited the women in slavery, just this single thought made her sick, she felt her body become tight, she would die rather than let other hands that Hiccup's touch her. They stopped before another carved wooden door, and Lucia turned towards them.

"What's your name?"

"Astrid..."

"Shailaine, and this is my daughter, Saoirse..."

"Fine, Astrid, you are the first expected..."

Astrid swallowed, staring the friezes carved in the wood of the door. She had no choice, no way to retreat. She clutched her fists and walked inside.

Flavius had left his uniform and was wearing a toga. He was sitting and seemed immersed in reading a scroll. When she entered, he didn't notice her immediately. She was surprised to find no slave at his side, he was the only one present, and the room was very simple, swearing almost with what she had been able to see in the palace until then. There were a few benches, a fountain in the center of the room and a few tables with overflowing baskets of fruit, which some were completely unknown.

Flavius looked up from his scroll, then he rolled it carefully, without detaching his gaze from hers. Astrid didn't know what stance to take, her first instinct was to support the look of the man who dared claim to possess her, but her instincts told her to adopt a low profile to be sure to get away from here unharmed.

"What's your name?"

Astrid eyed him with curiosity, he was talking to her in language of the North, with a slight accent, but she frowned and chose to respond in Latin.

"My name is Astrid..."

An amused gleam spent briefly in his gaze.

"Where did you learn Latin Astrid? It is rare that the barbarous people master it, let alone their wives... And the other slaves understand it but speak it very badly..."

Astrid greeted teeth before the obvious contempt with which he was speaking about her people.

"My people are different" she replied.

The truth was that Hiccup was different, and that on his own, he had influenced the entire island of Berk and its stubborn Vikings.

"Who taught you? Where do you come from?"

She understood why he was that curious about her knowledge of Latin. And she said that giving too much information would not make sense. Less information circulated about Berk and its tamed Dragons, more the island was safe.

"My husband taught me, on the island of Bjornekâ€|"

He observed her for a few moments, in silence, and she briefly wondered if he hadn't felt the half lie. Bjornek island was a few hours from Berk and did was populated by seagulls and a handful of wild dragons. He stood up and approached her with something indecipherable in his steel eyes. It was so close she could feel the heat radiating from his body and she had to suppress a movement of backing up. She wouldn't move back in front of anybody.

"I don't know what status you had on your island, Astrid, you have the beauty and the power of the Valkyries who populate the beliefs of your people... But here, you belong to me, and your obedience will be your safe..."

Astrid felt the anger bubbling in her. She had always been free and independent, the very idea to belong to someone made her mad with rage.

"I don't belong to anyone and I know how to protect myself" she replied in a fierce tone, forgetting even to speak Latin. She saw his face become tight.

"I think that you don't understand... My brother won't affect my slaves as long as they don't set problem... If you want to live, then and you'll obey and deal with your new place..."

She had to suppress the urge to punch his face, she wouldn't stand a chance in the palace. She bit her tongue for not answering. If he didn't seem as demented as his brother, Flavius seemed however able to be ruthless towards anyone who challenged him. Then the eyes of Flavius changed, there was something more thoughtful while his eyes looked at her head to feet. She shook her fists and tightened.

"I'm not going to touch you..." He said with a tired tone.

To say that she was surprised would have been an understatement. Slaves were not considered as full-fledged human beings, they were sub-humans without the right of speech or thoughts, objects at the disposal of those who possessed them, and this Flavius yet seemed to have a form of respect for her. She was expecting many things but certainly not this. As she was staring at him without saying a word, he added in grave tones.

"My brother on the other hand won't hesitate if you don't act as a

slave..."

She felt her blood boiling again.

"I'd rather die, nobody will touch me, a single man can do that..."

"Some fates are worst than death itself, replied Flavius. And if you don't want to discover how much I am right, just do what is expected of you... I can protect all of you only if you obey... My brother has eyes and ears everywhere"

"Why would you do that? You seem to consider us as inferior beings... As uncultivated barbarians... So why would you protect us? Why did you choose us while your brother wanted us?"

Flavius had a half-smile.

"You are no doubt a lot of things, Astrid, but inferior, I'm not sure..."

"Why would you do that?" she insisted, masking her trouble by a fierce expression.

This man was strange, Astrid didn't know much about the Romans, but the little she knew was enough to know that he wasn't like the others... She was pretty sure that his strange clemency toward slaves would look very bad if it came to be known...

His face twisted in pain so briefly that she thought she had dreamed. He suddenly turned his back and dismissed her with a wave of the hand. She wouldn't have an answer to her question. When Astrid came out, she was still slightly shaken by this surreal conversation. She expected to be treated as an invisible being, as the merchant of slaves had treated them, but this Roman was something unusual, and she didn't know if it was a good or bad thing. Although she escaped for the moment from Nero, which would undoubtedly unplease Drago, she wondered what would be the price.

She felt confused, she still didn't know what had happened between the time where Drago and mercenary had taken her on the huge dragon and her revival at the slave trader, she didn't know if they had touched her, if she had been abused while she was unconscious, and this black hole in her memory began to make her feel nervous. She sighed, her thoughts went to Berk, did Drago attack the island? And what if she fled to find that Berk had been taken and his people massacred? Her daughter, Hiccup, their mothers, their friends... What would she do then? She shook her head, trying to push away this idea and the morbid images that went with it. They were alive, she could feel it, if Hiccup or her daughter were dead, she would know it, her heart would feel it, besides, dragons were protecting Berk, Toothless was the Alpha, nothing could control them this time, and Hiccup would do everything to protect his people and she knew he would come and get her out of there

When Shailaine and her daughter came out of their interview with Flavius, Lucia took them to the kitchen and told them what to do. They would help with the meals and service in the common areas, before joining Flavius' apartments for routine maintenance. They met a few slaves, who barely looked at them.

Astrid had the impression to be disconnected from reality, what was happening to her was far too much, and she had so little control on the course of events that it was as if she was watching her life from the outside. At Berk, she was respected and considered, she existed as Astrid, she was recognized, here, she was one slave among others.

"He's a good manâ€¦"

Astrid turned to Shailaine and looked at her blankly. The young woman smiled weakly, holding her daughter against her.

"He's a good man, we are lucky..."

Astrid, incredulous, shook her head.

"We are slaves! How can it be a good thing?"

Shailaine looked at her for a long time before answering.

"I'm alive and I'm with my child, I feel lucky..."

Astrid felt a bulge in her throat. Her eyes filled with tears. She wasn't with her child. Shailaine noticed that she was on the verge of tears, but didn't comment, aware that the slightest word could make her collapse.

Walking to the kitchens, Astrid took the opportunity to breathe deeply and try to calm down. She should not be weak, she should be worthy of the people she loved, worthy of the strong and valiant woman they knew. She would come out of here, she didn't know how but she would come out of there.

Kitchens were like a giant hive in which people were running in the middle of poultry waiting for being plucked, quarry roasting, crystallized vegetables...

Astrid chewed her lips, she was a mediocre cook, the few times where she had wanted to make some elaborate meals, which wasn't burned was eaten by a Hiccup who swallowed every bite without daring to complain before drinking a glass of mead, no doubt trying to shoo the taste of his meal. One day, she saw him holding back tears. Astrid usually kissed him without a word, before dragging him in the great Hall for a decent meal cooked by Gobber.

"Astrid!" Kaleina was already at work and sent her a small sign from the corner where she was peeling vegetables.

Astrid went to sit beside her and took a knife to help her. Kaleina gave fearful glances around her, there were guards, and then, when her eyes crossed the look of one of the slaves, she turned away. Astrid frowned. The slave in question was a woman rather big and busty, her long brown hair were carefully braided and she ambled in kitchens with a secure and sufficient air, as if the place belonged to her.

"She Demetia, she bad..." whispered Kaleina watching at her busy hands.



"Did she hurt you?" worried Astrid.

Kaleina shook her head.

"No, but she helps master to do bad things..."

Astrid frowned and looked again at the named Demetia. She was staring at them with something that made her shiver. It felt like the gaze of a shyllock about to pounce on its prey.

"I'm afraidâ€¦" whispered Kaleina.

Astrid transferred her attention to the young woman sitting beside her. What could she tell her? That she had every reason to be afraid? That Nero was a demon in the body of a man? Kaleina seemed frightened and on edge permanently, she startled at slightest noise. Her skin gleamed with sweat in the glow of the furnace that surrounded them, her hair were erected around her head like the rays of a sun, and Astrid thought that her beauty would bring her troubles. Kaleina belonged to Nero, and Astrid feared for her, who seemed destined to become her friend.

"Kaleina, can I ask you something?"

The young woman nodded.

"Whatâ€¦ What happened? I mean, when I woke up, I was in that house, with the slave trader, but I don't remember what happened before..."

"You gone on demon that flies..."

Astrid frowned.

"What? Demon? I don't understandâ€¦"

"Yes, terrible creature who flies" explained Kaleina with big round eyes full of fear.

"Oh, I see... Kaleina, dragons are not demons... The dragons are good, sweet and intelligent creatures, but when they are controlled by bad people, they can do bad things..."

Kaleina seemed skeptical but she continued.

"We on boat, you come from sky to boat, you were drugged, because you resist..."

Astrid nodded thoughtfully. She had at least some information on what had happened until she was purchased as a vulgar sheep. Where was Hiccup? The last image she had of him wasn't clear, he was trying to fly on Toothless but they collapsed on the ground, she had heard his cry of distress as he watched her flying away into Drago's hands. Then everything became confused... She felt exhausted, her body and her mind were exhausted, and more the evening approached, more she felt a ball growing in her chest and tears accumulating in her throat.

When the time to serve the meal came, Lucia came to her and leaned toward her ear.

"You are going to bring the meal tonight... Keep looking down and don't speak, especially with master Nero... Not the time for clumsiness!"

Astrid nodded, grateful. Lucia didn't seem god hearted, but she didn't wish any harm to them and she tried to limit the blunders. She wondered if Flavius was for anything there!

Kaleina and Astrid took each a tray and followed the others slaves who went to the common areas, where the meal was served in silence. Astrid did her best to imitate the more experienced, envying Shailaine who had been assigned to the preparation of the rooms for the night.

She tried to look around her as discreetly as possible, she spied Nero, casually installed on a bench, in full conversation with two women and a man, all richly dressed. One of the women seemed barely older than Astrid and was of a breathtaking beauty. The woman kept glancing at Flavius, who was quiet, his eyes lost, impervious to his surroundings!

While serving the meal, Astrid heard the young woman exclaimed.

"You have new slaves, dear Nero? A new arrival?"

"Is that a woman from the North?" asked the man.

"She's of an impertinent beauty" commented the oldest woman.

"Yes, for a slave" replied the younger with disdain.

Astrid felt suddenly a shiver, as if an ice blade was suddenly pressed against her skin, and she knew that Nero was looking at her. She tried to remain the most impassive as possible, focusing on her actions. Then, she heard an exclamation, the sound of an object falling loudly on the ground and then, the silence.

She looked up furtively and found with horror that Kaleina had dropped a glass, splashing wine on the older woman. For a fraction of a second, the time seemed suspended, Astrid held her breath. The woman leaped and struck Kaleina, pushing outraged exclamations, while several slaves rushed to clean her. Kaleina had taken a step back and seemed petrified, she couldn't remove her eyes from Nero, who was watching her with a terrifying expression, just like a predator who realizes that its prey was within his reach.

"Take Lady Julia to change in my apartments" Flavius said hastily "you two, back in the kitchen!" he added, dismissing Astrid and Kaleina.

The two women rushed out of the room, hurrying towards the kitchens. Kaleina was pale and shaking as if she came to see Loki in person, Astrid put an arm around her shoulders and tried to reassure her.

"It's okay, Kaleina, it was an accident..."

Kaleina remained silent until the kitchen, where Lucia received them with a distressed and resigned air.

"You, go to help Shailaine with the rooms, you can retreat for the night then..."

"It was an accident" exclaimed Astrid watching Lucia, without releasing Kaleina "she's not going to be punished for it, it was an accident!"

Lucia, pursed her lips, took Astrid by the arm and pulled her out of the kitchen.

"Whatever the masters do or do not, what deserves punishment or not, is in no case to you to decide! You may be a princess where you come from, but here you live to obey, am I clear?"

Astrid wanted to protest, to say that she had never been a Princess, that she had married the heir to the throne of Berk, but she was above all a warrior, a free warrior. But she kept silent and contented herself to join Shailaine. She had to be careful, she knew how risky her position was.

They didn't see Flavius in his apartments, he probably was still with their guests, so they advanced silently into the deserted corridors, Shailaine carrying her daughter, who was sleeping from exhaustion in her arms. They both had no strength left, the sun was set for a long time, and Astrid just wanted to collapse, to lie down, even if it was on the ground.

Suddenly a terrible scream rang, freezing her blood. They stopped and stared at one each other, livid. A second scream, then a third. Astrid, her eyes wide with horror, kept walking as if she was high, trying to identify from where came the screams. She began to run, pursued closely by Shailaine, then they froze before a large door double which she recognized immediately. Neor's apartments...

She wanted to rush inside, but Shailaine stopped her, putting a hand on her shoulder.

"You have to stay out of that!"

"But! We can't just stay here and do as if everything was right! We have to do something!"

Shailaine's face hardened.

"Astrid, we must stay in our place if we want to live tomorrow...Remember what Lucia told us! And what the master told us... Our safety depends on our discretion..."

Astrid felt tears of rage and powerlessness burning her eyes, while she was led by Shailaine until the barracks where they had to sleep. The idea of being helpless was driving her crazy, but in her heart, the idea of never seeing Hiccup and their daughter again was far more unbearable.

She didn't resist anymore and followed Shailaine, her heart heavy and painful. They heard two more screams, then a silence that was worse of everything, a thick and stuffy silence, buzzing in her ears in a deafening manner. Shailaine put carefully her daughter on the straw mat and sat down before turning to Astrid, inviting her to settle.

Astrid sat, her knees under her chin. She was shaking and on the verge of tears. Shailaine sighed.

"You can't save everybody, Astrid..." she said gently, careful not to wake the other occupants.

"I could try, saving one of them is better than nothing!"

"You have to accept what is happening, what will now be your life, this is the only way to stay alive..."

Astrid shook her head but remained silent. This would not be her life, her life was with Hiccup and their daughter, their family, their friends. She missed them so hard, even Snotlout's bad jokes. She closed her eyes, she would give anything to be in Hiccup's arms, to snuggle her head against his chest and be lulled by the beatings of his heart. To feel his smell of hot metal, smoked wood and pine, so familiar, so comforting.

"I want to go home..." she breathed

Shailaine sighed, staring at her.

"What's his name?" she asked with a sad smile.

"What? Who?" asked Astrid, pretending not to understand.

"The one who would make you do anything for..."

"Hiccup" Astrid muttered.

"Do you love him?"

"More than anything... More than my own life...I know I'll see him again, he'll never give up, I trust him with my life... He's courageous, the bravest man I know, he's handsome, really handsome, I mean he isn't as stubby than the others but that's what I like about him, he's tall, and beautiful, and he has the most wonderful green eyes in the world, and he's clumsy, oh Thor, he is so clumsy..."

She chuckled, lost in the memories of Hiccup stumbling and grumbling. If one thing hadn't changed about him, it was that he was never where he was supposed to be, he had the talent to attract troubles, to set his foot just where he shouldn't be. Gods, she missed him so much, it hurt so bad

She swallowed and carried on.

"... but he's also incredibly smart, when he has a goal, nothing can stop him, and he sees the good in everything, he sees the good in everyone, sometimes wrongly, and he has the most pure heart I know..."

Her voice broke. Yes, Hiccup was probably the purest heart that is. He believed in the good, he believed in peace, she was ready to follow him to the end of the world, she knew what he was able to, and after all, he had won the heart of the fiercest warrior in Berk?

Shailaine sighed again.

"You loved and you have been loved, you are very lucky... So if you are that lucky, maybe he will find you, yes, I reckon he could... But then, what will he do? Could he buy you? Astrid, we belong to master Flavius, it's our destiny..."

Astrid considered for a moment the idea of asking where the father of her daughter was, and where she did come from to be so fatalistic. However, Shailaine finally laid in silence next to her daughter and closed her eyes.

Astrid did the same, her eyes lost in the dark above her. She refused to give up, she would fight until the end to join Berk and her family, and she'd rather die than spend her life in captivity away from all those she loved. She wouldn't give up. She wondered again what was happening on Berk...

What if Draco had attacked, she wasn't there to fight with her people, to protect her family... Hiccup seemed indignant and almost hurt whenever she invoked her need to protect her family, he included. He looked at her with big sad eyes, replying that he wanted to protect her, that it was also his role, that if anything happened to her, he could never forgive himself... She used to sweep his arguments with a shrug or a kiss, not imagining a second needing to be protected...

The sound of someone slipping on the mat, at her side, startled her. She turned her head and immediately sat down, her heart pounding, her throat thickening. Kaleina had just arrived, but when she saw her expression, lit by the moon, Astrid realized that something serious had happened.

She heard Shailaine sitting in silence, but she couldn't take her eyes off Kaleina. The young woman trembled so hard that Astrid could hear her teeth, her clothes were torn, ripped, the stripping half. She had her arms tight around her, as if she was afraid to fall apart. Her face was streaked with tears, more pale than ever in the light of the Moon, and she had an expression of pure terror.

Several places were already covered with bruises, and Astrid saw the blood that stained clothing to her legs. Without a word, she sat down beside Kaleina and put her arms around her. Kaleina resisted at first, and then let go. What could she tell her? What could she say to someone who had just lost his honor?

How was she supposed to find the words that would help her? She felt helpless, raging against herself, Hiccup would have found the words, words were never lacking to him, he knew how to touch, to move and to convince the more recalcitrant just with words. Astrid bit her lip, looking at Shailaine who hadn't said a word and was looking at them, her wide eyes lost in her round face surrounded by red curled locks.

"The... The master... punish me..." whispered Kaleina, so low that they almost didn't hear her.

Astrid expected that she bursts into tears or begins to scream, but Kaleina simply wiped her tears before pulling away from her to stretch, turning her back.

Astrid and Shailaine shared a concerned look. Astrid felt sick, she felt so much disgusted, so angry, that despite her fatigue, she felt her heart beat at full speed. She was mixed up, lost, terrified, but she had a certainty. If Nero tried to touch her, there would be only two alternatives. He would die or she would die. This fact established, she felt more relaxed. He had taken her freedom, her family, her people, he would not take her honor. She was Hiccup's just like he was hers. He was the only one who could ever put his hands on her. Him and him alone.

The day had been so long, so long that Berk seemed already terribly distant in her memories... She closed her eyes, tugged her arms around her and fell asleep.

Ooo

"We are closeâ€|" declared Johann, watching the horizon.

Thanks to dragons, the trip had taken a few days instead of a few weeks. Of course, it was necessary to be discrete and be ready to send the dragons hiding in the clouds as soon as a boat was in the vicinity, but Hiccup had told them that there was no time to lose, no matter what were the risks for their own security.

"Are you sure that's a good plan to not have a plan?" asked Fishlegs for the umpteenth time, sponging the sweat from his forehead and looking at the sky with an anxious air. Snotlout snorted.

"What, I'm just careful that's all, it's a good thing to be careful!" replied Fishlegs.

Hiccup nodded without really listening.

Astrid was there, somewhere in the horizon, he could only see his goal, bringing her back safe and sound at home, everything else, the Romans, the risks, all seemed secondary. Toothless purred, Hiccup placed an arm around the neck of his friend.

"I know buddy, I'm worried too... I hope she's fine... I can't lose her..."

Toothless licked his cheek. Hiccup had a half smile but his heart wasn't in this.

"You'll have to stay on the boat for some time, bud, we can't show them that we have dragons with us, I don't know to whom Drago had sold Astrid, or if he had sold her himself, I don't know if someone in Rome is expected our coming..."

Toothless grunted his disagreement and Hiccup stroked his head affectionately.

"I know, I don't like it either, but... I have to find Astrid..."

The words of Johann still echoed in his head. And what he came too late? They had several days of delay on Drago after all, everything could happen in a few days... Drago had sworn that she would be tortured in all imaginable ways... Hiccup clutched his fists and

buried his face against Toothless to push away the intolerable images that were trying to haunt him. He would become mad with grief if something happened to Astrid...

But barely had he chased this thought that another took his place. And what if she wasn't in Rome, on this island, with this man? What if they were wrong? What if Draco had kept her for him all this time? This idea made him sick and he felt cold sweat covering his skin. If he was wrong, he would have then left Berk and Astrid behind him, in the hands of his worst enemy?

"Master Hiccup, Toothless has to hide..."

Toothless wiggled his ears up, and understanding what was expected of him, walked away, his steps heavy, his face annoyed, to the hold of the boat.

It took them two hours to reach the port, they crossed several merchant ships and gunboats. Their boat was small enough to pass Ostia to reach Rome by the river.

"We're going to go ashore, we have to investigate... Be prepared to weigh anchor at any time..."

Johann nodded but didn't look reassured.

"How are you going to get Astrid out of there? I mean, if somebody bought her, she belongs to the Roman, and I doubt that he'll give her to you... And if she's with this Roman of whom I think, there's nothing you can do..."

Fishlegs seemed about to faint.

"The Romans don't know the power of Untameable Ruffnut!"

"Hey, that was my name, you mutton head!" cried Tuffnut.

"Untameable Ruffnut, would you mind if I try to tame you?" asked Snotlout with a grin.

"Ewwwâ€¦".

"That's disgustingâ€¦ Oh Gods, that's disgusting, I hate this kidâ€¦" muttered Johann.

"The advantage with desperate situations, is that the effect of surprise will be in our favor" retorted Hiccup, by checking that under his plain outfit, he had everything he might need, and most importantly, that his sword was ready to ignite at the slightest threat.

They kept going up the river until Rome. An unprecedented excitement got free of the port, outpost of a sprawling city which extended in front of them.

When he put a foot on the ground, the first thing that struck him was the overwhelming heat and the smell of fish, more strong than in Berk, probably because of the heat.

He looked up at the blue sky, several gulls passed above him pushing

outraged cries, and he briefly wondered where had been hiding the other dragons in the absence of the thick cloud band to which they were accustomed. But he trusted them, years of joint work had rendered them relatively autonomous, even though they still had as much need of their riders that their riders had need of them. He turned to Fishlegs, who seemed about to explode, he was so red that Hiccup was almost seeing smoke rising from his ears. Snotlout, Ruff and Tuff had stayed on board, being the only ones not speaking latin.

"We're going to find the place where they sell slaves..."

Fishlegs nodded wordlessly and followed him closely. Hiccup looked around him, he knew that in other circumstances, he would have been ecstatic, staring at everything, making sketches, a map maybe, noting everything, delighted to discover a new land, its inhabitants. But at that moment, he felt as if he was seeing everything through a thick fog. He scanned every face, every silhouette, hoping to recognize Astrid, hoping to see her shine golden hair, her long silhouette. Or at least to find Drago, or anyone who could lead him to her.

They walked in a labyrinth of narrow paved streets, all perpendicular. They saw fish dealers, butchers, stocks of cereals, there was constant noise, and Fishlegs had to raise his voice to be heard.

"Look, Hiccup!"

He quietly showed two men walking hastily, with two huge metal necklaces. Slaves. Ragged and as if trying to melt with the walls. And pulled forward by a man in a toga, who barely looked at them. They met a convoy of slaves and Hiccup felt a lump in his throat, imagining Astrid among them, impeded and vulnerable.

"We should follow them" whispered Fishlegs.

Until now, nobody seemed to notice them, they were merged in the cosmopolitan population that came and went, so they adopted a relaxed approach by following the small group of slaves, led by a small fatty man, and monitored by several armed men. Hiccup frowned when he saw a third man following closely the group... A red head man, in dark clothing, a red banner on one of his eyes.

The mercenary.

He squeezed his fists and hastened the pace, determined to keep him on sight.

Hiccup was always considered as peaceful, he did not like violence, then when he caught himself imagining the sensation of his fist hitting the face of this man again and again, he shivered.

He refused to let them take away from him the best of himself, they would not change him... He was confused, between his need to remain himself and the instinctive hatred he felt towards anyone who claimed to take Astrid from him, one way or another. He remembered this time when Snotlout, imprudent, had almost get Astrid killed, during training, he had never been so furious, his heart was still beating fast with fear, after seeing Astrid falling, and he had barely the will not to break Snotlout's nose, suspending him from the Academy



insteadâ€|

The group stopped in front an ordinary house, Hiccup and Fishlegs stood in a perpendicular street and watched what was happening. The little fat man handed him a pouch, the mercenary had a satisfied grin, they exchanged a few words, and he moved away, while the slaves disappeared inside the house. Was Astrid inside? Or had she been before being sold? Should he stay here or follow the mercenary... He nervously bit his lips and eventually said.

"Let's follow himâ€|"

They followed the mercenary, trying not to lose him in the crowd that went back and forth around them. The mercenary headed towards the port and Hiccup knew he had to act before he joined his ship and his men.

"Okay, follow meâ€|" he said, Fishlegs frowned with a quizzical look, but obeyed.

Hiccup walked faster, slowly and discreetly taking his sword. Frowning, his eyes focused, he could only see the broad shoulders of the man, paying no attention to the people who jostled him, or who were protesting in his path. He felt his heart beat faster in his chest, adrenaline rushing in his blood with anticipation. When he was close enough to the sickening smell of sweat of the mercenary, he stuck to him, and pushed his sword against his back. The man froze.

"Follow us or you're dead..." breathed Hiccup with a heavy threatening voice, that he had trouble to recognize as his. He had no more time for compromise, two years previously, he had delayed acting, and his father died. And even if everyone assured him that he wasn't responsible, he couldn't wait, he couldn't lose Astrid tooâ€|

Fishlegs preceded them, ensuring that no Roman Legionary would note what was happening. The man meekly let himself driven through the streets until they reached the boat of Johann. Hiccup urged him and they got on board, keeping an impassive air. Johann rised his eyebrows with surprise but decided not to ask questions, while Fishlegs stayed outside, Snotlout followed Hiccup.

In the room that was used as a shed, Hiccup pushed the mercenary and took a step back while the man turned to face him. He didn't seem afraid, and when he saw Hiccup, he had an amused smile.

"You had just made a mistake, kid..."

He showed the purse full of gold.

"C' is that what you want? Take it, you won't enjoy it for too long..."

"I don't care your gold, said Hiccup, I want to know to whom you sold my wife!"

The mercenary seemed surprised, then he frowned, looking at Hiccup, head to toe, his eyes narrowed then widened.

"You are that Viking, the dragon boy!" he exclaimed while he finally recognized him. He burst out laughing.

"So you followed us there! Drago was right, you would go to hell for this woman!"

"Where is she?" asked Hiccup, his jaw tightened, his gaze as edged as dagger blade. The mercenary crossed arms and smiled cruelly.

"WHERE IS SHE?" repeated Hiccup, his voice rising.

"I have to admit that your wife deserves the name of Viking, she's fierce... A small real beauty, so prettyâ€¦ You don't mind if I made her scream a little, do you? She needed a lover worthy of the name..."

Hiccup's fist hit his face even before he finished his sentence. The mercenary was on the ground, clutching his bloody nose, while Snotlout retained Hiccup. He was breathing heavily, as if he was about to explode, his green eyes had turned black and he was shaking with rage, his fists still squeezed.

"If you had touched her, I'll kill you, do you hear me, I'll kill you with my own hands!" he growled.

The mercenary spat blood on the ground before smirking.

"If only you had heard her crying, begging for you to save her, while I had my way with her..."

Hiccup let out a scream of rage and Snotlout had to push him back with all his strength, which was a first considering that he was twice the weight of Hiccup. Toothless rushed in the room, growling, roaring.

"Hiccup, stop, he just want to hurt you, to provoke you, don't let him win this one! He's lying, for sure!"

Hiccup, panting, glared at Snotlout, surprised that HE stopped him from striking their enemy. Snotlout was more "kick first, ask then". The surprise was however of short duration. Snotlout turned away and without warning, his foot struck the face of the mercenary with violence. The man collapsed to the ground, half unconscious. Snotlout turned to Hiccup, his fists on his hips.

"Well, hold back your dragon, I suggest that I take care of the interrogation..."

Hiccup nodded without really thinking. The words of the mercenary swarmed in his head, tormenting him relentlessly. What if he told the truth, and whether he had really done that to Astrid? He didn't even know how he felt, he was on the verge of sobbing, screaming with rage, he felt like he was about to lose his mind.

His body was sore, every breath was painful and he hurt, he hurt so badly, he missed Astrid so much, too much, he wanted the feeling of her against him, he wanted to breath her scent, to be flood by her laughter, he wanted her voice, her anger, her amused smile whenever he was telling her about a discovery or an idea, he missed her viscerally, as if a part of him was absent. He had never felt such a

lack, he had never felt so amputated, even after losing a part of his leg.

The mercenary snarled, regaining his mind. Snotlout grinned, typing his fist against his hand.

"We're going to have fun, yak's face!"

## 9. Chapter 9

**\*\*Hi guys, this is a new chapter! Less action, more revelation! I hope you'll enjoy it, and if you miss Hiccup, don't worry, he'll be back in the next chapter!\*\***

**\*\*Quarter, Dot, Hikka, Jo, lorde (lorde, you amazed me! Trying to read it in French, it's so brave! Standing ovation for you!), thank you soooo much for your reviews!\*\***

**\*\*Love you all, I've got so many views, I'm so happy to share this adventure with all of you! \*\***

**\*\*Please, let me reviews to share your feelings about the chapters (and again, sorry if there are some mistakes! I'm trying hard to avoid them!)\*\***

**\*\*See you soon!\*\***

**\*\*XXX\*\***

Astrid opened her eyes and stared at the ceiling for a few moments without understanding where she was. Then she remembered everything. She had the impression that a weight came crashing on her heart as the memories rushed back in her mind, she sat up abruptly and looked around her. Most of the other slaves were already standing, she saw that Kaleina was no longer beside her. She lifted her eyes and crossed Shailaine's, who shook her head before gently shaking her daughter. The sun was not up yet, but they had to prepare meals and clean pending the awakening of the masters. Astrid sighed and stood, stretching. She wasn't cozy, but a night on the ground wasn't an experience that she was used to. She was achy and crippled with pain.

"Get up you slackers! Or I'll make you get out with whiplash!" shouted a voice outside.

Astrid walked out, glaring at the Chief and his dog. If only she had Stormfly, it would be a pleasure to let her dragon catch this coward. He looked at her from head to toe and a vicious smile stretched his lips, revealing a toothless mouth. She grimaced, sickened, and turned away. He turned to Shailaine, who closely followed Astrid, and without warning, he grabbed Saoirse by the arm and shook her.

"Move faster little junk!" he screamed to the girl, who, terrified, froze, her teary eyes wide with fear and incomprehension.

Shailaine tried to get her back, but he pushed her to the ground, and Astrid's blood began to boil. She rushed to help Shailaine on her feet, before facing the Chief, who was still holding Saoirse and seemed pleased.

"Let her go, coward! She did nothing wrong!" Astrid cried.

"No, don't speak anymore!" Shailaine muttered, her eyes full of tears didn't leave her daughter, who was crying, trying to remove her arm from the ruthless grasp of the man.

"Leave her alone, she's just a child!" Astrid shouted, making a step forward. The dog began to grow, ticked up his chops, revealing fearsome teeth, and the man sneered.

"The Viking girl wants to go rogue, doesn't she?"

He released the little girl, who rushed to her mother to burst into tears in her arms, and he unwound his whip before slamming it to the ground, raising a cloud of dust. The sun was already high in the sky, and the heat was stifling. Most of the slaves were paralyzed, and blacksmiths had stopped working to watch the scene with curiosity. People who dared stand up were rare, and generally didn't live long enough to make the mistake again. Astrid frowned, scanning rapidly what surrounded her, hoping to find something to defend herself, but nothing was available. She squeezed her fists and didn't step back. A Viking didn't knuckle under anyone.

"You gonna taste my lash, pretty bug, you'll learn how to shut up and obey!"

"What's happening here?"

Lucia went towards them, her expression disgruntled. The Chief grinded his teeth, glaring at her.

"None of your business!" he growled.

Lucia didn't look impressed, she raised an eyebrow and crossed her arms.

"Indeed, on the other hand, this is master Flavius's business... They belong to him, I am sure that you'll know how to explain why they are damaged?"

Astrid saw doubt and fear in his eyes, he lowered his arm. He seemed to deflate, his vehemence turning into hatred and resentment.

"He won't always be there!" he screamed, turning to face Astrid. Then he looked around.

"What are you looking at? Go back to work!"

He went away, muttering and throwing killing glances. Slaves dispersed, avoiding to look at them, while blacksmiths returned indoors, with amused smiles. Lucia shook her head, staring at Astrid, who kept her head high.

"He blew up at Saoirse! He hurt her! She did anything wrong, it's unfair! She's just a child! He's such a coward!" protested Astrid.

Lucia sighed and shook her head, Astrid saw that she was angry but her gaze seemed softer when she spoke to her.

"Astrid, you're really going to end up having problems..."

Astrid shrugged, she was already overwhelmed with problem, one more or one less. She didn't care, her only priority was to escape from this place and find her loved ones.

"She's just a child! What was I supposed to do? I couldn't stay there and just look!"

Lucia had a strange, sad look.

"You remind me someone so much, she used to have this same thirst for justice, the same determination to protect the weakest... She was a woman from the North, like you..."

"Vikings are stubborn!" smiled Astrid. "Where is this woman?"

Her eyes darkened and she turned away.

"She's no longer with us!"

Astrid wanted to ask more questions, she didn't know why, but she wanted to know who was this Viking, who had the same fate... But she decided not to insist.

"Where is Kaleina?"

"Why would I know? I'm not in charge of her, she's probably working and you should do the same!" replied dryly Lucia, walking away, toward the palace.

Astrid hurriedly followed her.

"Working? She can't be working! She has to rest!"

Lucia threw her a side glance, and had a strange expression.

"Death only justifies not working when you are a slave..."

Astrid's eyes widened.

"So you know what happened! We have to do something! We can't just let him be, he's crazy! He's a monster!"

Lucia stopped and did u-turn to look at her in the eyes.

"Don't get involved in Nero's business, not on any account! Do you hear me little idiot! If you want to live, you saw nothing, you heard anything!"

"But!" stammered Astrid, taken aback by the sudden aggressiveness of Lucia.

"Enough! Go back to work! Master Flavius is going to leave in a few days, we have to prepare his luggage."

She walked away without another word, and Astrid decided to give up for now. She joined Shailaine, who was keeping her daughter against her. Shailaine didn't say anything, but Astrid saw the recognition in

her eyes. She smiled weakly at the girl, who suddenly broke from her mother to wrap her arms around Astrid's waist. Surprised, she froze, and then relaxed, tenderly stroking her hair. She would at least help an innocent person today.

Astrid worked in the kitchen all day, she didn't see Kaleina and began to really worry. She had heard the other slaves speaking in a low voice on her passage, she felt their eyes on her, without being able to determine whether all this attention, born of the altercation with the Chief, was hostile or not. Lucia seemed to avoid her and Shailaine also appeared to keep her distance, which she understood even less.

Astrid sighed. She looked at her dirty hands and grimaced when she moved her toes. Her soles were covered with blood, but she bore more or less the pain, as in the palace, the marble floors were no problem to walk on. She would have given everything to wash herself, to take a bath. Viking's way of life was tough, taking a bath every week was a luxury, but in Berk, the dragons allowed to provide the village in water quite easily, Stormfly used to heat the bath and Astrid loved the feeling of her tired body entering the hot water. Not to mention the few times when Hiccup joined her...

When the other slaves went to serve up the meal, Astrid was assigned to the cleaning of the kitchens, and then soil, before joining the apartments of Flavius. She was alone, she was on her way to join Shailaine and other women, but she didn't know where. She had to find them or Lucia would be furious. Then, she opened door after door, sliding a discreet eye inside. Most of the rooms were empty, but when she opened the fourth door, she froze. The room wasn't empty. Flavius was lying on a bench, an arm over his eyes, obviously asleep. She hesitated, she knew that she would have to turn around and move away, but on a table, several parchments were scattered and curiosity prevailed. For once, being barefoot was an advantage, she skipped silently up the table, almost holding her breath, and leaned on the scrolls.

When Flavius began to stir, she froze, stunned, barely daring to breathe. He began to mumble incomprehensible words.

"Hmmm... Fire... March... Solveig..."

Astrid frowned. Solveig? Who was Solveig? Flavius eventually calmed down, she could hear his regular breath again. She then turned to the table. She didn't read latin very well, Viking runes were so different, but she saw maps, plans... She frowned, and concentrated, trying to understand the contents of all these papers.

"There is nothing concerning the Vikings..."

She shuddered with a squeak and turned, wide-eyed. Flavius was sitting, well and truly woken, and his eyes pierced her like arrows. However, he didn't seem angry, he seemed almost curious and scared, which was strange given their respective situations. He stood up and approached her. Astrid swallowed.

"Can you read latin?" he asked, his eyes sliding on the parchment.

Astrid shook her head.

"No..."

He reported his gaze on her, and she could see again this glow, troubled, tortured, restless, and curious. He seemed suddenly so far and so close at the same time, as if his body was still here but his mind was lost in his memories, far away from the present.

"Solveig..." he whispered.

She had no time to think more, when she saw his hand rising to tend to her hair and her cheek, she leapt backwards, knocking the table, dropping several scrolls down. Flavius seemed to get out of a kind of trance and his gaze become impenetrable again.

"I... I am sorry... I... I was looking for Lucia and..."

She fell silent. What could she say? She was clearly snooping, it was a fact that she couldn't deny and sputter an apology rhymed to nothing. She knelt and began to pick up the papers that had fallen on the floor, putting them back on the table with haste, as if their casual contact burned her fingers. Flavius hadn't moved.

"The third door on the right, this is where you'll find Lucia..."

His voice was devoid of any emotion. Astrid swallowed and walked to the exit without a word before rushing to the door in question. She leaned a moment on the wall, catching her breath, her heart beating so fast that she wouldn't be surprised to see it jumping from her chest.

Lucia, who was heading the slaves in the preparation of the trunks, looked severely at her.

"I thought that you wouldn't honor us of your presence!" she said by delaying her attention on the frantic go and come.

"Erâ€¦Iâ€¦I was lostâ€¦"

It was probably better to forget the episode of Flavius. Lucia slammed her tongue, rolling her eyes. She sat up and began to work. She took the opportunity to think about what happened. This Roman was definitely strange, who was this Solveig, he obviously knew another Viking? Under what circumstances? And why this air tortured, what did he hide behind his gaze, that could move from unfathomable to haunted? She thought to what had happened, a very narrow escape, he was indulgent, hadn't been angry, it was almost disconcerting. On Berk, people didn't talk about slavery. They knew that most of the tribes practiced it, terrible stories used to circulate about that, stories that were whispered to the fireside, on evenings, to afraid or to be afraidâ€¦ Stories of torture, feet shackled to life... The lack of freedom was probably worse than death for most of the Vikings, and most preferred to die rather than be reduced to the status of slave.

Her thoughts slid off to Berk, to her family, to Hiccup. She had the impression that years had passed since the last time that she saw his face, when this mysterious storm appeared to be stopped in the open

ocean. She missed his beautiful green eyes, his goofy smile, his freckles, his calloused hands, how he used to smile, biting his lower lip, before kissing herâ€¦ She missed everything about him, every single detailâ€¦ And their daughter, their beautiful girl... She had barely the time to feel like a mother and now, she was far away from her, it was breaking her heartâ€¦ What if she didn't return? What if Hiccup had to raise her alone? What if she grew up with a father wiped out and no memory of her mother's face. She knew that he would make an exceptional father, he was already an exceptional father, but they were supposed to do that together, both of them, she wanted to be there, she wanted to be a part of this life they had both imagined and built... She shook her head, she refused to lose hope, she would see them again, she would join them, at any price. As Lucia approached to check what she was doing, Astrid decided to try her luck.

"Lucia, for how long have you been working here?"

"For long enough to see master Flavius birthâ€¦" she replied.

"Oh..."

"I was born as a slave, my mother was herself a slave..."

"What about your father?"

Her wrinkled face hardened.

"I don't know him..."

But her expression told otherwise, Astrid knew she was lying. She bit her lips, before asking.

"Who is Solveig?"

Lucia paled as she stared at her with horror. She grabbed Astrid by the arm and led her away, while glancing fearfully around her, as if she feared that someone had heard. But there was such effervescence, that nobody seemed to have listened to her.

"Who told you about Solveig?" she whispered furiously, her eyes hard and glowing with anger.

"No one, I just heard a conversation in the kitchens" lied Astrid.

"Nobody has the right to pronounce her name..."

"But who is she?"

Lucia frowned.

"It's none of your business!"

Astrid didn't get confused.

"When I was lost, I entered inadvertently into a room where master Flavius was sleepingâ€¦ He awoke and tried to touch me, whereas he had said that he wouldn't... He...He called me Solveig..."



Lucia seemed in shock and was looking at her with disbelief.

"How can you be that reckless? Maybe I should have let this idiot punish you! What arrogance! And master Flavius did say nothing? His goodness will be his loss!"

But despite her anger, Astrid saw that she was upset, her hands were shaking and her eyes were sad.

"Why do you care? Go back to work!"

"Lucia, tell me who this woman is, she's a Viking like me, the only link with my life..."

Lucia closed her eyes a moment, taking a deep breath. When she spoke again, it was in a whisper.

"Solveig was a slave a few years ago, she was your age, maybe younger at this time... Her village in the North had been attacked and looted, and she had been sold... Master Flavius was young, it was the first time he was going with his father and his brother. He chose her, just like he has chosen you, to avoid her falling into the hands of... Anyways, she was his... She was a brilliant girl, a fighter, sometimes too much, she was a sunshine in the darkness, despite what happened to her, she was always smiling, and she was so beautiful... You look like her a lot, she had long golden hair and so her eyes were blue, so pure that the blue sky seemed to fade when she was looking at you... I understand that he thought that. Well, in brief, master Flavius fell in. He had developed a deep affection for her, a condition that was shared... Poor lads... So young, so innocent. When he announced to his father and his brother his desire to marry her, there was a big hassle... Because by marrying her, she would have become a free woman... It was out of the question for them that a vulgar slave, even less a Viking, joins the family... Flavius refused to listen to them, they really loved each other... You should have seen them, they tried to hide themselves but everybody could see them holding hands, smiling at each other as if they were the only ones there. But the day before the wedding, she disappeared and was found two days later, far away from the palace but still on the island, it was... she had been raped... and she had been then killed and partly burned..."

The voice of Lucia broke. Astrid had brought a hand to her mouth, horrified.

"Master Flavius was wiped out, destroyed, devastated... She was a formidable woman, you'd have got on well, she did make the Chief crazy..."

Lucia smiled with affection, her eyes lost in her memories.

"Since this terrible day, master Flavius is no longer the same... He put months to talk again, he was fed by force, then he went to campaign, I think that the war helps him feel better... Or maybe he hoped to be killed. But the gods are cruel sometimes. And it's forbidden to pronounce her name, Solveig was loved, he refused to marry, he'll be loyal until his death..."

Astrid felt her heart twist painfully. This story was terrible, she

couldn't imagine living such a loss. Imagine having to live without Hiccup, from one day to the next, was inconceivable. She felt pain and compassion for Flavius.

"You look like him really much, it had to be a shock for him... Keep your distances, he doesn't deserve to be tormented!" added Lucia in a protective tone. "This is the last time that we discuss this subject, am I clear! Go, go to the forge, master Flavius ordered new weapons, we have to package!"

"But, who could do such a thing?" asked Astrid. Lucia looked at her with a settled expression.

"Someone close enough, someone who loves to watch the suffering of others..."

Nero.

"Go back to work now! Go! Don't tell anyone what I just told you, I regret already did it, go to work!"

Astrid turned away and came out of the palace towards the forge, immersed in her thoughts. She understood better the tortured look of Flavius, live without Hiccup isn't a life, nothing beside a life to get up and lie knowing Hiccup would be gone forever. She suddenly felt hitting a rock and she fell backwards.

"Hey, watch where you're going pretty!"

She looked up and saw a man offering her his hand. A giant, who looked terrifying, bald, bare-chested under a thick leather apron. She arrived at the forge. She refused the outstretched hand and leapt to her feet. The man sketched a smile and crossed his arms looking at her from head to toes, with an appreciative look. Astrid clutched her fists, she began to have enough to be observed and stared at in that way.

"I'm here for the weapons of master Flavius..." she announced sharply.

"You? Gotta been kidding me! You gotta just weigh the weight of a weapon!"

Astrid raised her eyebrows.

"Lucia sent me to take them, where are they?"

"You gonna hurt you, my pretty..."

"I'm not your pretty and I could make you cry like a child with an axe or a sword!" she retorted.

He burst out laughing, rejecting the head back. She wanted to pass him to enter the forge but he stretched his arm before her.

"Wait!"

She immediately grabbed his hand, twisting it back while mowing his legs with one of her own. Some blacksmiths who attended the scene

began to laugh. The man grunted, discontent, then stood.

"You didn't have to do that, I just wanted to tell you that you have to wait it out, it's warm inside..."

Astrid put down a laugh before his embarrassed air which contrasted with his gruff appearance.

"I'm not afraid by the heat, I spent lot of time in a forge..."

He glared at her.

"You? You are surely gifted to the fight..."

"You know that!" said a voice from the inside of the forge. Several laughs arose quickly covered by the noise of beaten metal.

The man muttered insults, glaring at Astrid, who had an apologetic smile.

"So, you worked in a forge?"

"Not me, but Hiccupâ€¦ He's my husbandâ€¦"

"Lucky guy! Or maybe not that lucky, you probably broke a few fingers! Where is he? We could need help here, the chief is going to Rome tomorrow to find oneâ€¦"

"I... I don't know..." said Astrid, her throat suddenly tightened. The man seemed to understand.

"I see... You should maybe find a replacement here..."

Astrid frowned and squeezed even more her fists, until she felt her nails painfully sink into her skin. The man immediately raised his hands and hastened to add.

"Oh, calm down, I didn't say that for me! I just say that for a pretty girl, being alone can be dangerous!"

"I can take care of myself" said Astrid.

"I noticed" he said, raising his hurt hand, "but the other slaves are not the only concern, there are also the soldiers..."

"I would rather die than leave one man other than Hiccup touch me..."

"Fine, fineâ€¦"

"And why do you care, we don't even know each other!"

"You remind me of someone, that's all..."

Solveig... But she didn't say it loud, Lucia's warning was clear...

"By the way, I'm Octavus..."

Astrid nodded. Something soothing emanated from this man, he seemed

reliable and trustworthy, but she remained on guard. A laugh sounded suddenly. A laugh, that immediately gave her nausea, and drained any color of her face. She rushed to the forge and hid in the entry, sliding a look outward. First, she saw the Chief walking in the direction of the palace.

With him, a man. Her blood froze.

Drago.

## 10. Chapter 10

**\*\*Hi to all of you! A new chapter, I loved writing this one, I really hope you'll enjoy it! Thank you for the reviews, support, it means a lot. I can't believe that some of you, like Dot or lorde, try sometimes to read it in French, it's impressive, I mean it, you guys rock!\*\***

**\*\*Quarter, Dot, Felix, lorde, Heli, Gues, Jo, thank you so much for your reviews, you are the best readers ever !\*\***

**\*\*Please review if you like it! Take care of you!\*\***

**\*\*XXX\*\***

It was a flight nothing more than usual, as every night, they ended the day with a long flight around the island before landing in their cove for a moment just the two of them. Since their wedding, a few months earlier, the moments where they could meet for a one-on-one were rare. Hiccup was busy from dawn to sunset with his duties as the Chief of Berk, even if he was helped by his mother and Gobber, and Astrid somehow managed the Academy, assisted by Fishlegs.

The days flew, and as soon as they were together, once at night, they felt as if they had been holding their breath all day long before finally breathe into each other arms.

But tonight, Harold was worried. He had noticed that Astrid was paler than usual, that morning, she had trouble getting up, while usually, she was the one who forced him to wake up. Then she had barely touched her breakfast, Hiccup had put his arm around her waist from behind.

"Something wrong Milady?"

Astrid had lifted the head to lean against him, her eyes closed.

"I just feel a little bit sick, I probably ate something that I wouldn't have eaten"

Hiccup had turned her so that she was facing him. Her eyes had black circles under them, she looked exhausted, he frowned, worried.

"You look ill"

"Thank you" she said dryly.

"Astrid, you know what I mean, you should rest, Fishlegs will handle with the Academy today..."

"No Hiccup, we have to pass the exams today for the new students, I'm fine, I promise!"

He shook his head.

"Ecoute, I'd really feel better if you..."

Astrid suddenly pulled away from his embrace, Hiccup glared at her, surprised.

"Hiccup, you're my husband, not my father, then leave me alone!"

She left the house like a storm, leaving a stunned Hiccup. What just happened? He only wanted to make sure that she was fine, and now, his concern was going to increase even more. He sighed and stroked the head of Toothless, who purred, eying his rider with a quizzical look. He hadn't seen her of the day, he went to their rendezvous point, uncertain, almost sure of not seeing her there. Yet she was there, looking sicker than in the morning, she had barely looked at him, but without a word, they took off together.

And after a few minutes, a worried cry from Stormfly alerted them. He then saw that Astrid was almost slumped on her dragon, her face had turned to a green shade, her eyes were closed and she was weakly gripping Stormfly.

"Astrid!" cried Hiccup as Toothless approached them. Astrid didn't answer, her lips pursed. Hiccup tried to ignore the wave of panic that he felt, he looked at Stormfly.

"It's ok Stormfly, we have to land, here, on this beach!" he said pointing the finger at a pebble beach which was at the west of the island. Stormfly obeyed, followed closely by Toothless and Hiccup, who stood by in case Astrid fell.

When they were close to the ground, Hiccup jumped and rushed to Astrid. He helped her to get off, Astrid lurched, took a few steps, and then collapsed to vomit. Hiccup, his eyes wide with fear, pushed her hair from her face moist with sweat, and waited until she had finished. When she straightened, her eyes half closed, as white as a sheet, he felt his throat tighten. Astrid was never sick, no worse than a cold, but he had never seen her in that state, and he was terrified.

"Hiccup..." she whispered, standing with his help.

"Hey, it's okay, we are going to Gothi's house, and everything will be fine" Hiccup said gently, wrapping an arm around her waist to support her.

She rested her head against his shoulder.

"About this morning, I... I'm sorry..."

"Shhh, it's okay, everything is fine, you are sick and... Astrid? Astrid!"

The young woman's body became heavy and he caught her before she could fall.

"Astrid! Astrid!"

He held her limp body against him and for the first time, he felt fear take control over him, and he didn't know what to do. He was terrified, he couldn't lose her, what if she was dying, or if she was already... No, she was breathing! He had to think, he should think, but his head was full of the image of Astrid unconscious in his arms. The worried complaints from Stormfly and Toothless get him out of his panic.

"Toothless, quick, take us to Gothi!"

He jumped up and settled on the back of his dragon, Astrid in his arms.

Gothi didn't let him stay with her, he had to wait for what seemed like an eternity before she finally got out, looking serious. He became Livid and his heart seemed to stop.

"Itâ€¦ Is it bad? Oh gods, it's badâ€¦ I... I can't lose her, is there an antidote?"

Gothi shook her head and Hiccup, his eyes full of tears, had rushed inside. Astrid was conscious and smiled weakly when she saw him. He took one of her hands and smiled back, hardly. She could die, and this thought made him sick, he couldn't live without her...

"Astrid... I... I'm going to find something, I'll never give up, okay, I'm going to save you, you can't die... I... I need you, okay? I am nothing without you, I... Why are you smiling?"

Astrid was staring at him, confused and amused.

"Hiccup, I'm not going to die, anyhow, I'm not supposed to die, if everything goes well..."

"Butâ€¦ What? But Gothi said that she hadn't any antidote!"

Astrid raised her eyebrows, her cheeks blushed suddenly, she seemed almost shy and nervous.

"Soâ€¦ She doesn't tell you anything?"

Hiccup began to feel dizzy, his nerves were cracking. He passed a hand in his hair, without pulling his eyes away from her.

"Tell me what? Astrid, what happens? I'm going crazy with worry there! Tell me that you're fine, I beg you, please, tell me you're not dying!"

"Oh Hiccup..." she said, tenderly taking his hands. "Hiccup, I'm fine... I'm more than fine actually... I'm pregnant..."

Relief, joy, shock, no word was strong enough to describe what Hiccup felt at this very moment. Astrid's eyes were shining with a new joy, Hiccup fell on his knees and put trembling hands on her abdomen, looking at her with a petition on his face, as if he couldn't believe it. She nodded with a huge smile on her face. He took her in his

arms, hugging her tightly against him, leaving tears of joys flow freely down his cheeks and then in the neck of his wife. She retained hardly her own tears, hugging him back. He laid his hands on her cheeks and kissed her passionately. Then he put his forehead against hers.

"We're going to have a baby..." he whispered.

Astrid, her throat knotted with emotion, nodded weakly. Hiccup closed his eyes, then reopened them. He was searching in her eyes, looking at her with such love that she was happy to be already sit.

"I was so afraid... I love you, I love you so much..."

"I love you too Hiccup, more than anything..."

"Astrid, I'm nothing without you, promise me that you'll never leave me"

"Even to go fishing or training?" she teased.

"Just promise me to always come back to me then"

He seemed so serious that she felt her heart tighten.

"I promise"

Hiccup opened his eyes. This memory was both painful and filled with joy. His life had so many times changed, in such a short time, he had been through every feeling, the visceral fear of losing Astrid the day of the birth, the joy of fatherhood, the confusion and extreme sadness of not knowing if he would see Astrid again someday... He sighed and looked down on his hands. He had always liked his hands, they drew, forged, manufactured, invented, tamed dragons, they were as an extension of his imagination and his soul. And today, they had nearly become those of a murderer. Snotlout had told him to get out while he was questioning the mercenary with the help of Tuffnut, but Hiccup had refused, he wanted answers, he wanted to know where Astrid was.

And then this man, this Boromir, had continued ranting about what he had done to Astrid, Toothless was grumbling, ready to shoot, and Hiccup eventually pounced on him to hit him repeatedly, until Snotlout and Tuffnut managed to pull him out of the room. They were, however, stronger than him, but in this state of anger, they had struggled to master it. He looked at the back of his hands. His knuckles were purplish, he does even not realized that he was hurt, as if anger anesthetized any pain. But he didn't want to heal his hands, the pain was there for him to remember who he was and who he refused to become. He had always claimed to be a man of peace, a man who refused violence, a man who favored dialogue, he had jumped on this man, whose hands were tied, to hit him in the face, he had completely lost control of himself, and he felt like soiled by his own cowardice.

He passed a hand in his hair. Drago was right, he was going crazy. Not knowing where she was, if she was fine, if Boromir had actually touched her, harmed her He felt his throat tighten. He wanted to see her, talk to her, he needed her so much. Could he live on? Could he continue without her? He had a duty, for their daughter, for Berk,

Berk that he had abandoned while Drago threatened his people. What kind of chief would do that?

"Come back to me, Astrid, please, come back to me..." he whispered.

Toothless winced sadly, dragging his snout under his arm.

"I miss her buddy, you can't imagine how much I miss her..."

Toothless purred with understanding, and then lifted his head. Snotlout came to them, Hiccup's heart missed a beat.

"I think he's finally ready to talk" he announced with a smirk.

Hiccup decided not to ask questions. He preceded Snotlout and entered the room. The man was sitting, leaning against a barrel, breathless, his face bloody and covered with bruises. Hiccup shot a disapproving look to his friends, who smiled proudly, but he didn't make comments. After all, some of these injuries were his fault... The mercenary raised his head. He was unrecognizable, but Hiccup felt no compassion. He knew that this wasn't worthy of the man he wanted to be, but he also knew that once his loved ones were threatened, nothing else mattered. When Alvin had threatened Astrid's life on several occasions during their teenage years, he was ready to do everything to save her.

"So you don't want to do the bad job, do you?" chuckled Boromir, before spitting blood. Snotlout approached and the man couldn't suppress a burst that made Tuffnut laugh with delight.

"Tell us everything you know..." Hiccup asked, stroking Toothless, who was grumbling again.

"She... She had been sold... To this slave trader, to be presented to a man, a certain Nero..."

"Why? Why this man?"

Boromir smirked, but his smile vanished as soon as Toothless began to growl, showing his teeth.

"Drago needs him... This man is crazy, we... Everybody knows that, in Rome, about what he does to his slaves..."

"The Romans are far too mad, even for me" Tuffnut muttered.

"What are Drago's plans for Berk?"

Boromir didn't answer immediately, Snotlout squatted to be at the same level.

"Maybe would you like me to refresh your memory?"

"He wants to attack Berk, he wants to destroy you, I have nothing to do with... with it... He wants the help of Nero... I don't know anything more, I swear!"



Hiccup shared a freaking out look with his friends. If the Romans were going to interfere, their chance of winning decreased dangerously, not to mention that the dragons were a secret kept by the peoples of the North, if the Romans learned that their existence was acknowledged, it would be bad, very bad... Hiccup turned away.

"I'm going outside, I'm going to find this Nero..."

"Alone? I don't think it's a good idea" replied Snotlout. Toothless nodded, looking at Hiccup.

"I'll be fine, it'll be easier for me if I'm alone" |

"And what about me?" moaned the mercenary. Hiccup looked at him with hatred.

"Please, don't hurt me anymore | I... I have more information! I... I know that today, a man from the island is coming to settle some business, I... I think that they need a blacksmith, he... He asked me if I had one in my merchandise |"

Hiccup frowned, and then his face lighted up. Finally, the gods were with him! Maybe they didn't hate him as much as he thought. Snotlout had an evil smile, while the eyes of Tuffnut went from one to another without understanding.

"Attach him solidly, I think that they have found their blacksmith..."

"Who?" asked Tuffnut, scratching his head.

"You really are an idiot" Snotlout sighed, rolling his eyes.

"Wait! I helped you! You have to release me!"

Hiccup smiled. The mercenary had lost his superb and his arrogance, Toothless often had this effect on people here... He turned his head to look briefly at Boromir.

"You said a very right thing earlier, I'd go to hells to find Astrid, and I wouldn't have any mercy for those who would want to hurt her or to take her from me..."

The blacksmiths 'district was just like the image he had of this place. Noisy, dirty, odorous, misty. There was an almost unbearable heat, but Hiccup was used to, even if in Berk, the outdoor cold helped to put the heat into perspective, whereas here, the blazing sun turned the streets in furnace. He was focusing on trying to hear something interesting, trying to grab snippets of conversation. He was beginning to despair when a howling drew his attention. An accident had just happened, a man was badly burned on the arm with the molten metal and he laid, unconscious, on the ground, while other blacksmiths rushed to his rescue. Hiccup rushed inside and quickly analyzed the situation. The post of the injured man had been abandoned, molten metal might be unusable if it wasn't worked immediately, the wounded man seemed well surrounded, it was an opportunity to show his knowhow. He took off his wet coat of sweat, took the anvil and quickly set to work to finish the sword that was being manufactured by the man. He felt as if he was back in the past,

to be in the forge, rocked by the chatter of Gobber, by the sound of hammers striking metal to sculpt it, focused on his work and nothing else, until Astrid sneaks behind him. He then had the impression that all of his rage, his sadness, disembodyed in every shot he hurled at the metal. It was just like during all these years of solitude, when the forge was one of his shelters, just like all these years keeping silent about his feelings, keeping silent about who he was, while he was trying to be someone else, before the dragons changed his life for the better.

Then he struck, carved, modelled, with aggressiveness and determination, he was going to get Astrid back, at any cost, he was going to find her, and he would never again let anything nor anyone take her from him. He wanted to cry, he was probably crying, his tears mingling with the drops of sweat. He hated Draco with all his soul, with every fiber of his body, he would do anything to protect his family, his island. Every shot that reverberated in the workshop seemed to be the echo of his heart, beating so hard, struggling with fear and sorrow. He wasn't even protected by an apron, he saw sparks flying around him, but he didn't care. If he didn't find a way to discreetly get this Nero's Island, he would go, at night, on the back of Toothless, no matter the risks, he couldn't wait any longer.

The last shot seemed to spread to his arm, his whole body. He watched the sword into his hands, he had never forged such a perfect one, straight, smooth, shiny and sharpened. His anger had never been so effective.

"You may not look it, boy, but you are incredible!"

The wounded man had been taken away, and the others blacksmiths were back to work, while the foreman had remained to watch Hiccup. Never interrupt a man with a hammer and molten metal, it was rule number one in any forge. A rule that Astrid was always strove to ignore.

"Thank you for your help!"

Hiccup shrugged.

"It's nothing, I was just passing, I saw what happened..."

"The gods send you to us! Without you, all the work of this sword would have been lost! The client will be happy... Ah well, here he is!"

The man who approached was accompanied by a dog and they looked as bad as one another.

"Master Titus! Your sword is ready!"

The man muttered something incomprehensible and took the sword from the hands of the blacksmith to observe it. His dog began to sniff Hiccup's prosthesis.

"Well, you outdid yourself!" Titus eventually exclaimed.

"Oh no, no, I didn't do anything, this boy had done everything! The man who worked on your sword had been injured and the boy fell from the sky, sent by the gods! He doesn't even work here!" replied the

blacksmith by putting a great slap in the back of Hiccup, who almost fell over backwards. Titus looked at him from feet to head with his little pig eyes, lingering on his prosthesis.

"Are you looking for a job?"

Hiccup, taken aback, didn't know what to answer, until the man added.

"You'll have several slaves under your orders, Nero wants the best blacksmith of the empire, and my sword tells me that you are, even if you are a metic!"

Hiccup's heart made a leap in his chest. Nero? The Nero? Was he finally going to see Astrid? He tried to keep calm, somehow. He cleared his throat.

"Ohâ€¦ Humâ€¦ And...Where does this Nero live?"

"Are you new here?" spat the man with scorn. "He lives in an island off the coast where he owns his own forge!"

Hiccup felt like he was going to explode. He had to keep an impassive face, while his heart was throbbing, beating far much too quickly, and despite his urge to speed up time.

"I take the jobâ€¦"

## 11. Chapter 11

**\*\*Hi! Well, summer break is over now (\*sob\*), my girls are back to school and I'll be back to work on Friday! I'm pretty happy to go back to work, I know I'm insane, but holidays wouldn't be holidays without work/school, would it?\*\***

**\*\*The chapter is shorter but I hope you'll still enjoy it!\*\***

**\*\*Quarter, lorde, Fault, PT, UnbreakableWarrior, thank you for your amazing reviews!\*\***

**\*\*One anonymous rider was asking why it has to be a daughter and not a son, and indeed, in most of the fictions, Hiccup and Astrid have a daughter. I'm going to speak for myself, I chose a daughter because I have two daughters myself, so I'm quite an expert, it was just obvious to me that theyr were going to have a baby girl! Besides, the heroes are both males, Hiccup and Toothless, even if Astrid is a main character, I can't help but think "girl poweeer"\*\***

**\*\*Let me a review, tell me how you feel, what you think, about my fiction\*\***

**\*\*Take care of you!\*\***

**\*\*XXX\*\***

The first instinct of Astrid was sticking to the wall, to hide herself from Drago. He was holding a burlap bag, and was listening to the chief with a sinister face, his dark gaze roaming around him, and

Astrid knew what he was looking for. He wanted to see his work, he wanted to see his revenge, under his eyes, he no doubt hoped to find a destroyed Astrid, and she knew that he would be disappointed and angry if he knew that Nero hadn't touched her.

"Everything is fine?" asked Octavus, his eyebrows raised with surprise.

Astrid nodded wordlessly and glanced in the direction of Drago. She could only see their back and they disappeared into the Palace. She hesitated only a fraction of a second before heading in the same direction, hugging the walls. She knew that Lucia was waiting for her, she was supposed to bring the weapons, but she had to follow him, she had to know why he was there. Maybe she could scrounge some information about the situation in Berk... She was a warrior, she knew how to follow someone without being noticed. She held her breath, barely daring to exhale, her gaze fixed on Drago's back. She crossed a few slaves, she saw that Draco was looking carefully at them, but hopefully, he didn't look in his back. Astrid ignored the questioning looks that the others slaves had, and she continued to move forward, stuck to the walls, keeping a respectable distance. When they passed the double doors leading to the apartments of Nero, she froze...

She bit her lip, looked furtively around her, and then followed them, her heart beating hard. She had the impression of entering the lair of a demon, she almost smelt something like brimstone and death around her. She knew that Lucia would be horrified if she saw her, she knew that she had told her to stay away from these apartments as long as she could, but she had to know what was going on, she desperately wanted news from Berk, had he already attacked them, did he know that Hiccup and she had a daughter, did he cross her husband's road? She was just afraid to be surprised by this Demetia that seemed so close to Nero, or worse, be surprised by Nero himself.

When she heard Nero's voice, she froze again and squatted immediately to hide behind a gigantic vase. She couldn't see them, they were in a nearby room while she was still in the corridor, but she could hear everything. When she heard the chief leaving, she hesitantly slid herself between the wall and the vase and held her breath. She had never been so grateful for being so thin. The chief passed before her without seeing her, and when he disappeared around the corner of the corridor, she closed her eyes and released the air she was holding. She knew he had to travel to Rome for a quick errand, she didn't have much time, and the risks of being caught were too high. She remained behind the vase and listened.

"Drago, I wasn't expecting you, what brings you here?"

"Did you receive my "gift"?"

"Yes, a nice one I have to admit, I'm not disappointed..."

"What about the Viking girl?"

Astrid bit her lower lip, her eyes wide.

"A fascinating creature..."

She shivered. The tone of Nero had changed, from courteous, he had become greedy, there was something in the way he spoke about her that gave her gooseflesh.

"But my dear brother wanted her, his choice is interesting..."

"That's not what we agreed about!" Drago growled.

Astrid felt as if she was looking at his dark face covered with scars, just by hearing him. He seemed however cautious in the presence of the Roman, he knew that he wasn't in a strong position and he was skillfully jockeying for a specific purpose, and she was determined to discover what was this purpose.

"You know, Drago, this Viking looks like very much a woman who once knew how to move my dear brother... To see his tortured face when he laid his eyes on her, it was as if he was seeing her spirit... It was very interesting, I'm curious to see how this will evolve... My brother is so predictable, it is quite entertaining to see him grieving and making himself suffer by taking this woman..."

Astrid felt a strong urge to vomit. This man amused himself by the misfortune of his own brother, he loved watching him suffer, he was monstrous.

"But don't worry, Flavius is leaving soon, you'll get what you wanted..."

She felt an icy sweat dripping in her back. Would she have the same fate as Solveig? She had the advantage of expecting it, and she would take with her the most she could if she had to die. She shook her fists and listened.

"But I guess that isn't the only reason for your presence..."

"No, indeed... I have a deal for you..."

"And what makes you think that I'm ready to deal with you? You are just a man from the North" replied Nero with obvious contempt in his voice.

"I can help you to get what you want, I can help to overthrow the Emperor and take the head of the Roman Empire..."

A long silence followed. Nero then began to speak again, calmly.

"And how would you do this?"

"The dragons..."

Astrid raised a hand to her mouth, her eyes wide with horror. Drago had revealed to a Roman one of North's best-kept secrets. All the peoples of the North were not necessarily allies, but all had agreed that the existence of Dragons, even when they were fighting them, years ago, should remain secret, in the event that the Romans, the most influential people, would decide to take advantage from dragons to conquer them.

The Roman expeditions in the far North, where Berk and the dragons were, were rare, they usually stopped at the merchant archipelagos of the Northern Kingdoms without venturing beyond.

"The dragons?"

Nero seemed skeptical.

"I have an army of dragons, I'm the only one to be able to control them, and I would like to put this army at your disposal..."

"So... They do really exist? What evidence do I have of what you're saying?"

She heard a noise and then a yelp that she could recognize anywhere. A Terrible terror. The dragon groaned plaintively and Astrid had a sudden desire to rush to deliver him.

"Thisâ€¦ is a dragon?"

"A Terrible Terrorâ€¦"

"Well, he doesn't look terrible or like a terror... That's your army, a group of tiny dragons... Lizards!"

"Don't rely on their size, they are redoubtable... And the others are much bigger..."

"I'd like to see your army..."

"I'll take you to see it if that is your wish..."

The dragon groaned again, and then his yelping became muffled. Drago had surely put him back in the bag.

"Let suppose I want to deal with you... What do you want in return?" Nero asked.

"I want the Empire's help to destroy an island, Berk, and build a Kingdom that will be your ally..."

Astrid swallowed hard. The situation was worse than she thought. Facing Drago was a thing, facing Drago and the Roman Empire was another. What chance would they have in this case? Especially since she didn't know to what extent Drago had managed to build an army.

"Astrid?"

She shuddered, her heart practically stopping, when she saw that Kaleina had seen her and was staring at her, her mouth gaping. The relief overwhelmed her, she came out from behind the vase, took Kaleina by the arm and led her towards the exit, as far as possible from Drago and Nero, almost running out of the apartments of the latter. She eventually released Kaleina once in Flavius' apartments, and dropped herself on a bench.

Flavius was working, he wouldn't catch her this time, she could hear Lucia farther, she was still giving orders for the preparation of the baggage. She took her head between her hands. She was lost,

horrified, what did she have to do? What should she do? Warn Flavius about the conspiracy? But how could she be sure that he wasn't involved in this attempt of seizure of power. If it didn't involve dragons and the destruction of Berk, she would have stayed out of it, but it was happening, they were going to destroy Berk, and she had to do something...

She felt like crying, her head and her heart were about to explode. If Drago was able to convince Nero to ally with him, they were lost. Her island, her friends, her family, all lost. Where was Hiccup? He would do anything to protect his people, she knew that, but if only she could warn him. Nero was as crazy as Drago, perhaps even more. Oh, Odin, she had to do something...

"Astrid?"

She raised her head. She had almost forgotten Kaleina.

"Oh, Kaleina! I'm so glad to see you, I was worried..."

The young woman had swollen eyes and looked exhausted, she had several bruises on her face and Astrid felt a lump in her throat.

"Howâ€|How do you feel?"

Kaleina looked at her feet.

"I'm fine..."

Astrid took her hand.

"No, Kaleina, you're not fine..."

Kaleina flinched and lifted her teary eyes, and Astrid couldn't hold herself anymore, she took her in her arms. A sob shook Kaleina who clung suddenly to Astrid as if her life depended on it.

"Me uncleanâ€|Me... I love Kebanji, Kebanji like me, but me unclean..."

She sobbed harder.

"Oh dear godsâ€|" whispered Astrid.

What could she tell her? The weight of tradition was important, Viking or not, she perfectly understood the distress of her friend.

"Kebanji loves you, this is not your fault, nothing of what happened is your fault, you did nothing wrong, Nero is the monster, oh Kaleina, if Kebanji loves you, he'll understand..."

She didn't know him, but she knew that most of men wouldn't understand and would just turn away, but she knew that if it happened to her, Hiccup would understand. He had a sense of compassion that was beyond belief. She shuddered at the idea of going through the same thing.

"Me want Kebanji, me want home..." Kaleina cried. Astrid bit her

lips, holding back her own tears.

"I know, Kaleina, I know how you feel... You'll see him again, one day, I'm sure of it...

\_And I'll make sure of itâ€|. as soon as I'll be out of there...\_ she thought.

Kaleina stepped away.

"Me back to work..."

Astrid nodded and looked at her going out with a pinch in her heart. She shook her head and stood up to move as quietly as possible to the forge. The chief would be back, she had to avoid him, the altercation of this morning was surely not forgotten. She thought about what she had heard. She'd wanted to escape, but how? Even if she succeeded in stealing a boat, she would not go very far. If only Stormfly was there... The heat came down on her as soon as she passed the threshold of the palace. The air was muggy, and according to the mass of dark clouds that were looming on the horizon, the time was going to turn to the storm in the evening. She hurried, Lucia was going to be furious, she was probably wondering where she was. She began to run, but while she was just a step from the forge, she froze. She felt like a punch in her stomach, she felt her knees weakening. The forge was before her.

Octavus was still outside, and before him...

No, it was not possible. It was just impossible.

Tall, thin but muscular, unruly auburn hair, a prosthetic on his left leg. Her blood throbbed dully in her ears, her heart beat so fast that she was sure that it was going to stop or to burst out of her chest, she was shaking, she didn't know anymore how to put one foot before the other, she was just paralyzed, too terrified that at the slightest movement, to any sound, any breathing, he would disappear. She wasn't sure to be able to survive the hole in her heart then. Was she suffering from hallucinations? Were the gods playing a cruel trick on her? She closed her eyes, trying to breathe, to calm her heart, and when she reopened them, limpid green eyes met with her blue ones, with the same disbelief, the same uncertain joy, the same terrified happiness, the same fear to see her vanish.

Hiccup.

## 12. Chapter 12

**\*\*Hi guys! Not much time here, so let's go for a new chapter! Thank you so much for the reviews! Please more and more, I'm just addict!\*\***

**\*\*Enjoy and review!\*\***

**\*\*Take care of you!\*\***

**\*\*XXX\*\***

As soon as he put a foot on the island, Hiccup kept scanning each



human figure he could see. He was much too preoccupied with Astrid to admire the beauty of the island. As he walked, he felt his heart beating, fast, both excited and terrified. Was she there? How would she be? Would she still be herself...? He was haunted by the words of the mercenary. By images of Astrid between his filthy hands. Then he kept walking, almost forerunning the chief, whom he wasn't listening to. He was looking at the palace, he saw slaves, his heart missing a beat every time, wondering if these people knew Astrid, if they had become her friends. He let then the chief lead him to the forge.

Before leaving, the chief glanced at him suspiciously, but Hiccup didn't pay attention. Then a man, Octavius, had begun to introduce him to the team, before dragging him towards the outside to show him where he would sleep.

He felt her presence.

A thrill ran through from deep within himself, as if his soul knew before his eyes could see. He turned his head.

And she was there.

Alive.

Astrid.

Alive.

He felt his heart swell in his chest, and beat so hard that he felt that his whole body was vibrating at the same pace. Astrid. Astrid. Astrid. Looking exhausted, slightly emaciated, but alive, so alive that he felt tears burning his eyes.

She was there, her blond hair styled wisely but whose several crazy bits escaped, her large blue eyes fixed on him. She seemed shocked, stunned, then he made a step, then two, as mesmerized by his vision, he seemed almost in a daze. The voice of Octavius was lost, he couldn't figure out anything else than the beating of his own heart. He couldn't see anyone else than her.

Suddenly, she ran, closing the distance between them to rush into his arms. When he closed his arms around her, he felt as if he had finally found a part that was missing, it was as if everything had finally found its place, as if finally the world had found its meaning.

"Hiccup, oh Hiccup, tell me that I'm not dreaming, tell me that..."

Her voice was low and husky. She broke into tears. Hiccup couldn't speak, Astrid never cried, Astrid rumbled, hit, flew, but she cried so rarely. His throat was knotted with emotion, he clasped his arms around her as if he was afraid that she would disappear, as if he was afraid to disappear, as if she was his anchor to life, he was shaking and wondered how he had survived until then, she was everything, everything seemed so false without her, he realized how much his heart hurt, how much her kidnapping had affected him. He had tried to hold on, for his daughter, for his people, but to have Astrid in his arms, to have his nose in her hair, made all his fears rush in his

heart, exacerbating every emotion he had wanted to forget. He held her tighter, swallowing hard, enjoying the warmth of her body against his, the frantic beats of his heart beating against hers.

"I love you, I love you so much Astrid, I thought I would never see you again, I thoughtâ€¦"

His voice died in his throat, he put his forehead against hers, putting his shaking hands against her cheeks.

"Hum... You should go back inside before someone sees you..." suddenly suggested Octavius, watching nervously in the direction of the Palace.

Hiccup put a protective arm around Astrid and led her inside. If Gobber was there, they could think themselves back in Berk, just after the first "I love you", when their reunion were made of whispers and stolen kisses. Octavius showed them the back room, and asked no questions. Once alone, Hiccup again caught Astrid's face between his hands and brought his lips against hers. Astrid grabbed his neck, letting herself consumed with this kiss, trying to show him how much she loved him, how much she had missed him. He moaned, and then forced himself to pull away, his eyes darker...

"I love you, I love you more than anything..." he breathed.

"Hiccupâ€¦ Hiccupâ€¦" she whispered his name like a prayer, her eyes still wide with disbelief and joy. She cuddled against him. She needed to feel him, to have him against her, to know that she wasn't dreaming.

"I love you, you have found me, I love you so much..."

She was upset. The fierce Viking Warrior was under the impression that the gaping hole in her heart was finally closing. Then suddenly she withdrew, looking distraught. The words crossed her lips, even if she was terrorized by the answer.

"Our... Our daughter?"

"She's fine! She's with your mother and mine, don't worry..."

Astrid's eyes filled again with tears, both of relief and grief.

"Sheâ€¦ She won't recognize me, sheâ€¦ she won't remember that I am her mother... Oh Hiccup, I'm so sorry..." she sobbed, hiding her face against his shoulder.

Taken aback, he pulled away and glared at her.

"Astrid... You... Oh, Astrid, it's my fault, I should have known that it was a trap! I... I have sworn to protect you, on our wedding day, and long before that day, I swore to take care of you and... Astrid, what have they done to you? Did they hurt youâ€¦ Did theyâ€¦"

He paled and his jaw clenched. Astrid knew what he was talking about. He took her hands, studying her face, looking for answers that he

waited desperately.

"No! they... I'm fine, Hiccup, nobody touched me..."

He closed the eyes with relief, cursing the mercenary, then he reopened them and squeezed her hands.

"Astrid, what happened? What happened since you were taken, I mean..."

She didn't know where to start, she tried to remember everything, and then she stared at him, her eyes wide with urge and panic.

"Hiccup, Drago is here..."

She felt him tense suddenly, his eyes became hard and fierce, the green turning almost to a steel gray. She reported the conversation she had listened between Drago and Nero. Hiccup stayed silent for a while, frowning, Astrid knew this face, he was thinking, she could almost see the wheels working in his brain. He looked at her with determination.

"Astrid... I'm going to get you out of there!"

"Hiccup! Gotta protect Berk, you gotta protect your people, if Drago and Nero are together, we are lost, unless you go on Berk to organize a plan of defense, perhaps you could even find allies..."

Hiccup glared at her, without understanding.

"You have to leave, where is Toothless, that..."

"I'm not leaving without you!" Hiccup cut her firmly.

Astrid felt her heart tighten. She didn't want him to leave without her, but what other choice did they have? If she left with him, Nero would go to Berk to avenge, she had a chance to prevent Hiccup, so that he could do what's necessary to protect their people. Gods, she wanted to hold him and never let go, but she had a duty, they both had duty, they had to put Berk's need before theirs.

"Hiccup, you have to think about our people, our daughter, to..."

"Astrid, I'm not going anywhere without you, listen, Astrid..."

His voice became hoarser, as if his feelings were overwhelming him. He gently stroked her face, with a sweetness and infinite tenderness.

"Astrid, I can't, okay? I can't, I need you, you're everything, Astrid, you are everything to me, and if you disappear, I disappear, I can't, I just can't..."

His voice had taken desperate accents, he wanted her to understand how important she was to him, he needed her just as he needed oxygen to breath. Any protest died when he captured her lips with his own.

"Whatâ€¦! What are we going to do?" she whispered against his face, when they parted.

"We don't have much time, I'm going to find something, I promise you, trust me..."

"I trust you..."

And it was there. In her eyes, in her burning gaze. This unwavering faith that had made him lift mountains, this unwavering confidence on which he had built his own, crossing the impassable, confronting the slightest obstacle. It was in her that he drew his energy, it was thanks to her that his wildest ideas were born. She had more faith in him than he had faith in himself, she saw in him what he couldn't see, and he had never felt so grateful to the gods to have her in his life.

He stroked her cheek, his eyes scanning her face, as if he wanted to memorize the slightest detail.

"I'm not going to let anyone separate us anymore..."

It was more than a promise, it was an oath, something he sealed with his soul. She closed her eyes and leant her cheek against his hand.

A throat clearing startled them. They turned. Lucia.

She was shaking with a barely contained rage, her eyes went from one to the other, as sharp as the blade of a sword. Behind, Octavius was as disappointed as sorry. Astrid stood before Hiccup and challenged her. Lucia squinted at her.

"You got a death wish, girl?"

Her voice was dangerously low and wheezing.

"I want to go back to my family, I want to go back to my daughter..."

"And this crippled is your husband?"

Astrid expected everything except that from Lucia. It was mean and low. She took a step forward, her fists tight, but Hiccup put a calming hand on her shoulder.

"It's okay, Astrid..." he said calmly. Astrid, her lips pinched, stepped back.

"We don't ask you anything, just don't tell anyone about me..." he added gently.

Lucia stared at the young man before her, with his funny leg ended by metal, with his face that still had traces of childhood, with his big green eyes clear and sincere. She knew that she was insulting, but she was so furious.

"Why should I listen to you?" she asked. Her voice was less threatening but remained cautious.

"Because you know what's right, because no one deserves to be ripped off to his family..."

Lucia tensed but didn't respond.

"I don't want to harm anyone, I don't want any trouble, I just want to take Astrid home..."

"You won't be able to escape, they'll catch you in a heartbeat, and your fate will be worse than you can imagine..."

Hiccup frowned, his face tightened and when he spoke, it was with a firmness and honesty that surprised Lucia.

"The worst fate would be to live without my wife, I love her with all my soul, and I will not leave without her..."

Such an authority emanated from him that Lucia couldn't help to feel convinced, yes he would leave with Astrid, it seemed so sure in his eyes, and in his voice, that she couldn't doubt.

She didn't know what was freedom, she was born a slave and had known a life of servitude, but when she looked at them, seeing their intertwined hands, pride in their appearance, their gaze that seemed to shine with all the adventures they had shared, she had the impression of taking a breath, it was as if her lungs had never breathed, as if she discovered the taste of oxygen. So, it was thus that, freedom? The feeling of finally being able to breathe? She turned them back to hide her disorder.

"Astrid, you have things to do, if you get caught, I'm aware of nothing..."

She left hastily the forge and Astrid followed her with her eyes until no longer seeing her. Then she turned to Hiccup.

"You have to be discrete, don't draw attention to yourself... And this man that you have followed... He left..." said suddenly Octavius before going out in turn.

He barely knew them, he barely knew their history, yet it was as if he did, and they felt the same breath of gratitude to the blacksmith they had just barely met.

"Come tonight at the dormitory" she muttered, kissing his cheek. He hugged her, he didn't want to let her go. He had just found her, the idea to leave her was physically painful.

"Be careful" he whispered, gently kissing her forehead.

Lucia avoided her gaze when she brought the weapons. She simply asked her to go to the garden and to help with the harvest, Astrid knew that she wanted simply to avoid having her close to her, but she didn't care, she needed a bit of fresh air.

She struggled to not have a silly smile, Hiccup was there, he was there, he was there, she wanted to scream it to the whole world, she wanted to dance, which was not at all "Astridish". She was beaming, she couldn't help it. She had to cross the garden to go to the kitchen garden, and she loved this place. It was fresh, there was

such a variety of trees, flowers, there were even pools of water, and none of this existed in Berk, where everything was hard and without embellishment, with sole purpose survival in the austere climate of North.

A laugh of child suddenly drew her attention. She urged the step and eventually saw Saoirse who laughed out loud whirling in an alley. Man laughter sounded then and she saw Flavius trying to catch the little girl, who laughed even more. He suddenly seemed younger, so reckless, the shadow that used to obscure his face had disappeared, their laughter was communicative and she couldn't help smiling. It was so hard to believe that he and Nero were brothers... Saoirse twined her arms around a tree trunk and Flavius squatted to be at her level. He showed the shaft and articulated in Latin.

"Tree..."

"Tree" repeated the girl. Turning to him, she saw Astrid.

"Astrid!" She cried running towards her. Astrid smiled and greeted her in her arms. Saoirse seemed so much less shy than before, she had rosy cheeks and bright eyes. Astrid wondered if paternal attitude she had surprise in Flavius was for something there. Flavius arose and went towards her, he regained his seriousness and this indecipherable look. She thought about what Lucia had told her. She imagined herself in his situation, and she felt her heart tighten to this broken man. Saoirse began to skip, stopping from time to time to smell a flower.

"You seem... happier..." Noted Flavius, glancing at her.

His hands in his back, he had turned to the girl and Astrid only saw his profile. She didn't answer, what could she answer?

"You do still expect to go back to your ones?"

She tried to hide her surprise, though vainly. This man seemed to know how to read her facial expressions, it was confusing and quite creepy.

"I know I'm going to go back to where I come from" she replied.

"You belong to me..." He said that casually, without this possessive and cruel tone that had his brother. He had simply pointed out a fact.

"I do belong only to the gods" retorted Astrid.

Flavius turned to face her. He had again this air both tortured and curious.

"You are beautiful" he whispered.

He didn't try to touch her or to move forward, then Astrid held on moving back.

"I could... You could... You could be free... If... If you became mine..."

She knew that by 'mine', he didn't talk about her as a slave. She swallowed aggression she felt arise whenever a man claimed to have her, looking at her with so much lust that she felt dirty. She snorted.

"My heart belongs only to one man..."

He looked at her for a few seconds.

"Tell me about this man..."

She frowned. Why did he want her to tell him about Hiccup? She hesitated.

"He's... brilliant, smart, far too smart for his own good... He's brave, courageous, he is sincere and loving, caring, he's such a good man, he has a noble and generous soul..."

"But he's not hereâ€|"

She wanted to argue, to tell him that yes, indeed, he had crossed many stormy seas to find her, he was there, in the forge, and he would get her out of there. But she had to shut these words that might get them killed.

"He's going to come for me, I know that he is..."

Saoirse had gone in the direction of the garden and wasn't visible anymore. He approached her and she repressed a shiver. He had the same lost eyes, he suddenly seemed far, far from her, far from the present. He put a hand on her cheek and she shuddered as if her skin had burned with his contact. She pushed his hand and leapt back. He grabbed her wrist and wanted to kiss her but she struggled, discovering in horror that he was much stronger than she thought.

"Let me go!" she growled.

"Weâ€|We could be happy... You... You could have everything you want..."

He wanted to touch her face again but she withdrew as far as possible, her arm still prisoner from his grip.

"Let me go..."

"We could be happy..."

He was pleading and had tears in his eyes. He was looking at her but not seeing her, she was only a ghost from his past to him. She shook her head.

"No, no, I'm not Solveig, let me go, I'm not her, I am Astrid, you are hurting me!"

He was holding her wrist so tightly than she winced with pain, but when he leaned to kiss her again, she couldn't take more of it and just gave him a head butt. He was thrown away from her, releasing her wrist, falling on the ground, bringing both his hands to his nose. He

blinked several times, in shock. He glared at her blankly, he looked at her wrist on which his fingerprints were already turning purplish blue.

"I'm sorry, I'm so sorry!" he stuttered, horrified.

Astrid was shaken, her head hurt, her wrist hurt, and she had an irresistible urge to hit him.

He stepped back, discouraged and shameful, and then he turned so that she was facing his back.

"He's very lucky!" he said in a low voice.

He walked away toward the Palace.

Astrid nearly dropped to her knees. Her legs were shaking, her heart beating so fast he was probably going to break some ribs. She closed her eyes and breathed deeply. She had her account of emotion for the day. She did want only one thing. Waiting for the sunset and being with Hiccup.

### 13. Chapter 13

\*\*Hi guys, it's been a while! Well, a while for me at least! The week has been sooo long, I'm just exhausted, I wish I could go back to summer break and just enjoy!\*\*

\*\*I hope you'll like this chapter, don't hate me for it!\*\*

\*\*Thank you so much for your reviews! Yeah, Flavius was creepy, but I like this character, he's far more than who he seems to be, he has that dark side which is scarring, but he's also so human, in his good and bad sides!"\*\*

\*\*Astrablack1248, iiii, Jo, Quarter, Fault, lorde, thank you very much for taking the time to let a review, it means a lot!\*\*

\*\*I have a little "game" for all of you readers. The reader who will let the 100\*\*\*\*th\*\*\*\* review will be able to ask me to write a one shot, the only condition is that it has to be about Hiccup and Astrid, of course!\*\*

\*\*Don't cheat by letting many reviews just to win, it has to be interesting!\*\*

\*\*Take care and please, review!\*\*

\*\*XXX\*\*

\_They usually never argued. Sometimes, they just agreed to disagree, but their exchanges were passionate discussions, never disputes. And yet, this time, they had been fighting. Astrid fulminated, she never had been that angry against Hiccup.\_

\_It was as if she couldn't recognize him anymore. They were seventeen, and Hiccup had to go with his father to a highly sensitive visit of a few days at the nearest tribe, who was several days of vol. Astrid naturally volunteered to accompany the mission, and to



her huge surprise, Hiccup had rejected this idea without even trying to discuss. He rushed away, but he poorly knew her if he thought she was going to give up, she followed him up to the arena to try to make him change his mind.\_

"\_You have to stay in Berk, the Academy needs you!" He argued, avoiding her gaze.\_

\_Astrid had raised eyebrow, her fists on her hips.\_

"\_You know that Fishlegs can rules things perfectly!"\_

"\_Yeah, it really doesn't bother me, I prefer to stay if you don't mindâ€¦|" Fishlegs said.\_

"\_Coward" chuckled Snotlout. \_

"\_I... I'm not a coward!" Fishelges was outraged." But all the same... The tribe of the Reapers is renowned for his cruelty!"\_

\_He looked worriedly at Meatlug, who came to snuggle against him to comfort him.\_

"\_See! I'm coming with you! If it's dangerous, you'll need me!" said Astrid, gesturing with both her hands.\_

\_Hiccup kept gathering his tools without looking at her, and she didn't know if she was confused or furious. Hiccup had always listened to her, and he usually couldn't keep his eyes out of herâ€¦| He always considered her opinion, at least almost always if she counted the whole Heather thing. But he had never put her on side and she felt hurt. Didn't he trust her anymore? They were not in an official relationship, even if they were acting as a couple for two years, supporting each other, protecting each other, doing nothing one without the other. Then she couldn't understand. Had he changed his mind, about her, about them? She ignored the pain in her chest.\_

"\_No way! You're not coming!"\_

\_His voice was determined, just like the night he took her on that flight that changed everything in their lives.\_

"\_Hiccup, I'm not going to let you go and meet a hostile tribe with these idiots!"\_

"\_Hey!" Ruffnut protested.\_

"\_I don't feel concerned" replied Rustik.\_

"\_Who is she speaking about?" asked Tuffnut.\_

"\_My father will be there, there's no risk!"\_

\_Astrid stood before him in the hope of capturing his look, in vain. She suddenly grabbed him by the neck and put her face a few inches from his, glaring angrily at him.\_

"\_Woooo, what a fierce love!" laughed Ruffnut, crossing her arms.\_

"\_Yeaah, Astrid you're acting like a dragon, wait, aren't dragons supposed to mate outside? Because we're outside but I don't want to see that!" said Tuffnut.\_

"\_Me neither!" replied Snotlout, shivering.\_

"\_ . .YOU!" Astrid articulated, ignoring them. Hiccup pulled away, but his eyes never met hers.\_

"\_No! You'd be useless out there!"\_

\_Astrid had stepped back as if he had just slapped her on the face. When he saw the hurt in her eyes, Hiccup realized what he said.\_

"\_Astrid... "\_

"\_Non... You're right, I... I'm useless..."\_

\_She turned away, climbed up on Stormfly, ignoring the pleas of Hiccup, and she left.\_

\_Of course, he had followed her, of course with Toothless 'speed, he had caught her, of course, she had ignored him, asking to Stormfly to go faster and higher. She had then landed in the cove, jumping back to run away in direction of the forest. She needed to hit something, to launch her axe against a few trunks to avoid throwing it at Hiccup's face.\_

"\_Astrid! Hold on! Astrid!"\_

\_He had managed to catch her up, and had took her arm, forcing her to face him. She glared at him.\_

"\_Let me go!" she hissed in a threatening tone.\_

"\_No! Not until you listen to me!"\_

"\_I don't listen to anything from you, you've been perfectly clear, you don't need me!"\_

\_He seemed panicked but didn't let go her arm.\_

"\_No! No! Astrid! That's not what I meant! I need you! I do!"\_

"\_So what? Why don't you want me to come with you!"\_

"\_Beâ€¦ Because it's too dangerous!"\_

"\_Are you serious, Hiccup? I can perfectly defend myself, after everything we went through, I thought that you'd trust me a little more..."\_

\_She heard her own voice tremble, making her angry against herself. She refused to be weak, she wouldn't cry, let alone before him.\_

"\_Oh boy, I trust you Astrid, I really do, you know that I trust you with my life!"\_

\_He flushed and looked lost and worried.\_

"\_I'm one of the best warriors in Berk, and I'm seventeen, when she was seventeen, my mother had already participated in dozens of raids against the dragons! Today, we live with them, and believe me, I couldn't be happier about that, but I still want to be useful!"\_

"\_You are useful, with the Academy and..."\_

\_Astrid cleared her arm with an annoyed exclamation.\_

"\_I want to come with you! This mission is dangerous! I know how to fight, you need me!"\_

"\_Astrid... Please, would you just stay in Berk... Don't make things more difficult...'\_"

\_His determined voice became pleading. Astrid, taken aback, glared at him.\_

"\_Hiccup, what is this about? What's going on? Why are you so eager to make me stay?\_"

\_She had to restrain herself from grabbing him and beating the truth out of him.\_

\_Hiccup sighed and let himself fall to the ground, taking her hand and inviting her to sit with him.\_

"\_My father told me about this tribe... They are very violent, Astrid, if we go there, it is because there was an altercation between two of our ships a few days ago... The situation is very tense..."\_

"\_I know that Hiccup, but stillâ€¦!"\_

"\_They take the women... When they travel, or when they receive tribes, they just abduct them..."\_

\_Astrid frowned. Hiccup was looking right before him, his face tense with concern. Toothless growled softly, as if he understood the concern of his best friend.\_

"\_If they like a woman, they just take her, they hold them back on the island if their tribe came to visit, or they kidnap them when they are out of their island, and they married them forcibly... Most of the tribes don't say anything for fear of a war, because they are redoubtable... Other tribes avoid them, that's what we used to do, but with this altercation, we have no choice..."\_

\_Astrid understood suddenly. She gently placed a hand on his arm, and when she spoke, there was no more anger in her voice.\_

"\_Hiccup... I know how to defend myself..."\_

"\_We won't have our dragons out there" he protested, facing her and grabbing her hands.\_

"\_Hiccup, I knew how to defend myself far long before the dragons! Do you need a demonstration?"\_

\_She hoped to make him smile, but he sighed, he looked frustrated and he turned away to face Toothless, who was playing in the water.\_

"\_Hiccup!" She exclaimed, exasperated. "We have faced worse dangers! And you never wanted me to stay! "\_

"\_This has nothing to do withâ€¦ It'sâ€¦What if... And if you were... I... I don't really know how to fight, without Toothless I mean, I'm not even sure to be able to protect you... and that's driving me crazy, I tried to practice, but we don't have time andâ€¦!"\_

"\_Hiccup, I don't need you to protect me! We protect each other, but I don't need any extra protection! I just need you to trust me!"\_

"\_I do! Astrid! You don't understand! At the slightest misstep, we could start a war! We will be in a position of weakness once there, if they decide to keep you, we are understaffed, and I refuse that... I can't accept it! If they want to take you, I won't let them, and then, I would start a war! You have to stay here!"\_

\_Realization hit her hard. Making her heart bursting with hope and love.\_

"\_You... You would start a war for me?"\_

\_He blushed violently, focusing on his hands that nervously played with the grass.\_

"\_Yes, I wouldâ€¦" he whispered, avoiding her gaze.\_

\_Astrid bent and tenderly kissed him on the cheek.\_

"\_Thank you, to worry for me, to protect me... But you don't have to do that, you knowâ€¦!"\_

"\_Astrid, I'll always do everything to protect you..."\_

\_His tone had something possessive and fierce that made her shiver and melt.\_

"\_Hiccup, she sighed, you can't tell me about how dangerous they are and hope that I'm just going to stay!"\_

"\_Gods save me! Astrid, please! If something happens to you, if these men put a single hand on you..."\_

"\_They would end armless!" she cut him, raising her axe with a smirk.\_

"\_I'm serious!" cried Hiccup, standing, driving his hands in his hair with desperation.\_

"\_So am I Hiccup, calm down! Why are you so concern, it wouldn't be the first..."\_

"\_It is not like that! Astrid, they could ask you in exchange for peace, as they have already done in the past! And I can't handle that, and I know that my father wouldn't too, and there would be a war, and it would be terrible because even with our dragons, people would die, but I can't let them take you, because I love you, I love you, and I refuse to let someone take you from me..."\_

\_His voice was soft, almost in a tone of defeat, as if he hadn't planned to talk about his feelings but he had failed to hide them, as if his words had just escaped his mouth. Astrid was staring at him, her mouth slightly ajar, looking at him with disbelief.\_

"\_Youâ€¦ You love me?" she asked, her voice was low, as if she was afraid of waking up and realizing that it was just a dream.\_

\_He wasn't facing her and he had let her hands go, his eyes were fixed beyond the horizon. He didn't answer, so she stood up and approached gently to stand beside him. Their hands stem, she intertwined her fingers with his. He didn't dare to look at her, he had often imagined the day when he would admit his feelings for her, and none of his fantasies included disputes or cruel tribes.\_

\_She stood before him and he finally looked down at her. She smiled shyly, placed her hands on his shoulders, and stood on the tip of her toes to kiss him. A kiss which lasted, a kiss which took away the breath from their lungs, desensitizing all their senses. When they pulled away, their face separated by a few inches, she whispered, her breath tickling his face.\_

"\_I love you too, Hiccup..."\_

When Astrid woke up the next morning, she stayed still and she kept her eyes closed. She wanted to keep this memory that she cherished so much, their first "I love you", which seemed so close and so far away at the same time. Years had passed and yet, each 'I love you' was causing her the same emotion. Slowly, she carried a hand to her lips, to her neck, touching every spot Hiccup had kissed the night before, just a few hours earlier, reliving the caress of his hot breath against her skin, like thousands of butterflies that would have touched her. He had whispered so many "I love you" in her ears, filling her with thrills of well-being, this delicious impression to warm up from the inside.

The day before, after leaving Hiccup to join the other slaves, Lucia had come to see her in the evening, giving her a key.

"My room... If we find you here, I'm not aware..."

Lucia was the only slave to have a room, near the kitchens, an application of Flavius. Astrid was touched by this gesture, she didn't know what to say, how to thank her, so she had put her arms around Lucia's neck for a hug, trying to put on it all the words she couldn't say.

Hiccup had joined her once everyone was sleeping, late at night. She then told him everything, omitting the temporary insanity of Flavius, she didn't want to worry him unnecessarily.

Hiccup had told her how their friends and he had managed to find her,

how Toothless was hiding in Johann's boat, how the others dragons were supposed to stay away until they need them. Then he kept silent, staring at her, drinking every detail of her face with adoration. And, softly, tenderly, he had kissed her on the forehead and eyelids, on her cheeks, her nose, before eventually claiming her lips as his own.

Astrid opened her eyes and smiled with a sigh of contentment. Hiccup was there, he had found her. She didn't know what she had done to deserve someone like him in her life. She straightened. The sun wasn't yet up, but Lucia had given clear instructions, Flavius departing in the morning. Hiccup had already left, regretfully, so she stretched and stood up, slipping quietly out of the room. Some slaves were already busy in the kitchen, she saw Shailaine and Kaleina and walked towards them.

"Where have you been?" asked Shailaine suspiciously.

Astrid bit her lip, Kaleina seemed so exhausted and broken, she looked at them but seemed so far from them, and as if her lips were sealed. Astrid felt nauseous, how could she feel so... relieved, while her friend was suffering. There hadn't been new howls that tore the night, but enough nights without her on the layer next to her, she could guess what was happening. Astrid felt her stomach lurching.

"Where is Saoirse?" she asked, hoping to think about something else.

"Master Flavius wanted to teach her Latin this morning before leaving... He's really a good man..."

Astrid felt uncomfortable. Yes, he seemed to be a good man, yet his grief seemed to devour him slowly from the inside, madness watching for him in this inability to mourn.

Shailaine began to rinse the fruit that she was preparing.

"Anyway, don't change the subject, where have you been?"

Astrid wanted to tell her so bad, to tell them, but she knew that it was better to keep a low profile. Then she just smiled and moved away.

"This conversation isn't over yet!" cried Shailaine.

Astrid felt so light through the corridors of the Palace. Yet she knew that nothing was played, she was still trapped as a slave, and Berk ran a serious risk. But Hiccup had the gift to bring hope everywhere where he went. Regardless of the situation, he was like a steadfast pillar, a light in the darkness, he lit up everything from his comforting presence, his brain, his soul, and Astrid had a blind faith in him.

He would get her out of there and he would save Berk, she had absolute certainty of it.

A plaintive cry followed by crying pulled her from her thoughts, she raised her head. Her heart seemed to drop into free fall. She froze and looked straight at the other end of the corridor, horrified. The

chief was pulling Saoirse by the arm, the girl was struggling in vain, and they disappeared behind the two doors that Astrid dreaded to cross again. Nero's apartments.

Her heart beating wildly, she accelerated, her legs were shaking, something was wrong, she could feel it, she knew Hiccup was there, waiting to see her, but she had to do something. She crossed the doors without hesitation and followed the little girl's cries. When she entered the right part, time seemed to stop. Saoirse struggled on the knees of Nero, who smiled with an air so cruel and so vicious that Astrid had the impression to cope with Loki in person. She felt her whole body stretch while Nero lifted his eyes towards her with something triumphant in his eyes.

"Let her go..." she hissed.

"And otherwise?"

Astrid knew she had no chance. The Chief was still there and seemed to wait a gesture of Nero to grab her. And she knew that at the slightest alert, soldiers would come. It was so unfair. Hiccup had just found her...

She looked at the girl's face, terrified and strained with tears. She wouldn't step back.

"Or I'll kill you with my own hands..."

Nero burst out laughing, his eyes glowing with that madness which send a shiver in her spine.

"As pretty as predictable... Do you know how much I expected the departure of Flavius to discover you? My brother is stupid, if I didn't need him, I would already have had my way with you, he's weak, if he wasn't haunted by that whore, he could have enjoyed everything you have to offer..."

"Let me punish her, master" the chief begged, with an eager expression.

Nero released Saoirse, who ran to hide behind Astrid, grasping her.

"You threaten a Roman, you know what we do to the barbarians who dare to threaten us?"

Astrid stepped back, she turned slightly to Saoirse.

"Go get Flavius, run, go!" she whispered.

The girl, wide-eyed, didn't ask any question and ran out of the room. The Chief wanted to catch her but a gesture of Nero stopped him.

"Let her go! I wanted to have fun, I have what I wanted..."

He began to slowly turn around Astrid, who, fists clenched, didn't move. She tried to focus on an invisible spot, but she still felt his eyes looking at her up and down, as burning as embers.

"You know, dear Astrid, you are a commodity of choice, you were lucky that my brother picked you... Pretty Astrid, you can't imagine what you're going to live..."

She swallowed, she had to keep her composure, but she felt the panic about to overwhelm her. Hiccup was in the forge, unaware of what was going on, and even if all her soul asked for him, her brain and her heart were telling her otherwise, so she tried to calm down. If Hiccup intervened, everything would be lost, his cover wouldn't be valid anymore, and two against a hundred guards on an island, away from their friends and dragons, they had no chance.

If only Saoirse could get Flavius before he leaves the island... Was he going to intervene, she didn't know, she couldn't be sure about his reactions, she only hoped that his humanity would intervene in her favor. Any attempt to keep calm flew apart when Nero slipped behind her and grabbed her waist. In what had become a reflex, she drove him back and threw him to the ground. She knew that she had just signed her death warrant.

"Guards!" the chief shouted, rushing to stop her, but Astrid turned and her fist crashed into his face, he fell back, hands on his bloody nose. She had heard a crack and the joints of her fingers were painful but she couldn't help but smirk. She had wanted to do that since her arrival... Ten guards entered the room. She knew she was lost, but she would leave this world as a warrior, and she was more than grateful to the gods to have had one last night to share with Hiccup. She would have liked to see her daughter, she wasn't ready, she didn't want to die, but she had no time to think about it, she had to act.

"Do you know what is the punishment for daring to hit a Roman? Death!"

Two soldiers helped Nero to stand up, he then borrowed the sword of one of them, before turning to her. The first rays of the sun reflected on the blade of the sword, and Astrid wondered briefly what it was like to die. Would she suffer? Or was it going to be brief? Who would welcome him at the gates of Valhalla?

"What's going on?"

Flavius stood in the doorway of the entrance, slightly breathless, as if he had just run. Nero seemed upset, he showed Astrid from the tip of his sword.

"I thought you were gone!" Nero said coldly.

"Well, obviously, I'm still here, what's going on?"

"I was about to punish this female who tried to hurt me!"

"What happened?" Flavius asked, his gaze going from Astrid to his brother.

Flavius seemed lost, and then Astrid saw his fists clutched.

"You have tried to abuse two of my slaves, they belong to me Nero, you don't have the right to touch them without my permission... They are my property..."



Nero sneered.

"Aren't you going to punish her for what she's done?"

Flavius looked briefly at Astrid, when she saw how he looked sorry, she shivered, wondering what to expect.

"No, if she offended you, she'll be punished, but she'll live..."

Nero lowered his sword, and seemed satisfied, whereas the chief snorted.

"Fineâ€¦".

She didn't feel relieved. She knew that no matter what would be the punishment, once Flavius gone, Nero would end what he had started.

"Fifty lashes!" quietly announced Nero.

He seemed too comfortable, as if he had everything planned, as if he had two shots ahead of everyone. Astrid held her breath, wide-eyed. Fifty?

"Nero..." began Flavius.

"The penalty for what she has done is death, don't you see how merciful I am..." Nero interrupted with a smile. Titus, take her in the main courtyard so that everyone sees what happens to slaves who dare to intervene..."

The Chief looked like someone who has just seen his dream come true. His nose was blue and swollen, probably broken, and blood had dried on his face. He grabbed her by the arm, taking care to hold her so tight that it hurt, and dragged her unceremoniously, followed by Flavius, his expression dim, and Nero. The guards followed them. The courtyard was exposed to the Sun, which shone like an eye blinding over their heads. Astrid had the impression that everything went in slow motion.

Slaves who froze on their passage, the terrified whispers, people who gathered, then the shot in her back that made her fall on her knees. She felt the sun's rays warm her skin, it was no more than only a matter of minutes before they become too hot.

She looked up and met terrified eyes. Lucia. Kaleina stood back, one hand on her mouth, as if she was keeping herself from screaming, her eyes closed. Shailaine was nowhere to be seen, and Astrid assumed she was with Saoirse. Nero and Flavius stood, facing her, slaves brought immediately seats and what to shelter them from the sun.

"That's what happens to anyone who dares to challenge me!" screamed Nero in speaking to the slaves. "You belong to me and anyone who forget it will be punished!"

Flavius seemed about to vomit, his fists on the armrest were firmly tight and trembling.

But his gaze remained cold and distant, as if he was angry against Astrid. The whip slammed to the ground, raising dust, which then deposited on the dirty feet of the Chief.

Astrid closed her eyes.

## 14. Chapter 14

**\*\*Hi guys!\*\***

**\*\*I'm back with a new chapter, I have to say that I loved writing it! For those who miss the dragons and their friends, don't worry, they'll be back in the next chapters!\*\***

**\*\*Thank you so much for the reviews, you rock, really!\*\***

**\_\*\*Lorde:\*\*\_\*\* you're just amazing, big hugs for you from south of France! Thank you for following my fictions with such enthusiasm!\*\***

**\_\*\*Heli\*\*\_\*\*:\*\*\_\*\* Yeah, troubles seem to follow her! You don't hate me, do you?\*\***

**\_\*\*PT:\*\*\_\*\* yeah, Nero is as crazy as nasty! A real bad guy, it's so good to hate him, isn't it?\*\***

**\_\*\*Quarter:\*\*\_\*\* you're adorable! I hope you'll have answers in the chapter! \*\***

**\_\*\*Felix:\*\*\_\*\* I love it when I read how you imagine what they are going to do, I love your enthusiasm, thank you so much for sharing it with me!\*\***

**\_\*\*Dot:\*\*\_\*\* thank you so much! Astrid is my favorite character, she's so strong, smart and kind, I'm glad Dreamworks had decided to add her in the movie! \*\***

**\*\*Thank you very much again!\*\***

**\*\*Enjoy and review!\*\***

**\*\*XXX\*\***

Hiccup knew that something was wrong when he saw the guards leading the slaves. The blacksmiths were spared, but all the others had to follow the soldiers. He frowned, his heart began to beat a little faster and his face got tense with concern.

"I'm going to see what's happening!" He announced a few minutes later.

The others blacksmiths had quickly accepted him, they were all at work since dawn, and it was as if he had always been there. Hiccup couldn't help wincing thinking that he was actually helping forging weapons for his enemies, but he strove to remember that it was for Astrid, and it was worth it.

"I come with you", said Octavius.

The man hadn't asked any questions to Hiccup about the day before, he seemed to have understood the gist and had decided to help wherever possible. The two men slowly followed the soldiers, looking around them, trying to understand why the guards were frenzy and why the slaves had a dim face. Hiccup swallowed hard, he couldn't find Astrid in the crowd, and he had a premonition that something was wrong. As time seemed to have stopped, all activities were suspended and he saw that all were gathered, in a heavy and deafening silence. He heard the cracks before arriving at the court. There were only few murmurs, and the regular sound of powerful cracks of a whip. When he heard "Viking" in the mouth of one of the slaves, he had the impression that an icy steel hand had grabbed his heart, closing its strong fingers around it. He began to push people in his path, trying to force a passage through the crowd, and then he froze his eyes wide with horror...

"No..."

He instantly felt someone gripping his arm and trying to pull him back. But beyond the heads of the crowd, he saw two Romans installed in seats in the shade. And in front of them, he saw her. Kneeling, her back arched, the whip falling tirelessly on her. She had her head high, but he was too far away to see the expression on her face.

"Shut up, don't say anything, you would sign your death sentence, to both of you..."

Hiccup was smart, everybody knew that. He knew that he couldn't do anything to help her, he was alone, Toothless was waiting, and probably getting mad, in the ship, there was no way to get her out of here without being both killed. The feeling of helplessness that overran him was so strong that he could hardly breathe. He knew that the arms pulling him away from Astrid were those of Octavius and a woman who he couldn't identify. He was vaguely aware to be struggling, attracting some looks from the slaves. But he couldn't emit sounds. It was as if his own cries of agony, pain, anger, were stuck in his throat, and it was unbearable, he was suffocating with grief and rage.

He wanted Toothless to rush to the island, he just wanted to catch Astrid, and to leave this cursed place, to go away and to fly back to Berk, without thinking about the consequences. When he found himself in the back room of the forge, he shot his fists on the wall with a cry of rage that finally burst out of his lungs. He put his forehead on the cold stone of the wall, he was breathing hard and fast, it was as if his heart had been ballasted with lead.

A sob escaped him. Then a second. He suddenly rushed towards the door but Octavius blocked him.

"Let me go! I have to go by all the gods, they are torturing her, I must do something..."

"You'll die!"

"I have to do something! I can't leave her... I'll go crazy if I do nothing! Astrid!"

Octavius closed the door making a sign to him to shut up. Hiccup grabbed his hair with his hands, he didn't know what to do anymore, he had the impression that the ground was collapsing under each of his steps, the pain he felt was unbearable. He couldn't protect her, he could not, and he felt as if he was losing his mind. Octavius grabbed him by the shoulders, forcing him to stop his frantic pacing.

"Listen, I don't know much about you, you told us your name was Stoick, but I heard her calling you Hiccup... I don't know who you are and why you are there, but I know one thing, if you go, you'll die both..."

Hiccup pulled away and turned to face the wall, before shooting again his fists on the wall with a cry of rage.

"Stay here, I'm going to see what's going on!"

Octavius got out, leaving Hiccup alone. He wiped the tears on his cheeks. Each second seemed to stretch in an eternity, he was in hell, his chest was burning with suppressed cries and sobs, he couldn't hear anything from outside, except the sounds of metal beaten from the forge. He had no idea what was going on and it made him sick. He would have given everything to have Toothless with him... He had never missed him that much. When the door opened again, he jumped.

Octavius entered, with a dim face.

"They have taken her to the dormitory..."

He stopped Hiccup, who was already rushing towards the exit.

"Later, at night, when everyone will sleep..."

"But..."

"Later..."

Octavius was right, Hiccup knew it, yet he was seized with a sudden urge to jump on the blacksmith and to hit him.

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Astrid felt a metallic taste in her mouth. She pressed so hard the teeth that she was bitten her tongue until feeling the blood, but she refused to give up, she refused to cry, to scream, to emit any sound. Astrid Hofferson was fearless, Astrid Hofferson showed no weaknesses. The only one to know her fears and her weaknesses was Hiccup, and she refused it to change. Every stroke of the whip was as a bite, like a burning blade which would have been applied on her skin. The pain was unbearable, she had the impression of being on fire under the merciless sun, with every stroke of the whip, she felt her flesh tearing, she felt a warm liquid slowly sink in her back, she felt her nerves protest.

Chief sniggered whenever his whip slammed on her, she could hear the murmurs of the soldiers, she could hear the horrified silence of the other slaves, she could hear the birds humming in a tree, oblivious

of what was happening before them. But she saw nothing, her eyes set a distant point and narrowing with pain with every blow. Tears rolled down her cheeks and she felt suffocating. She would have loved yelling, a part of her wanted to release that saving cry, to moan and to gesticulate, trying to evade the bite of the whip. But she wasn't going to give them this satisfaction, she was a Viking, if she should die, it would be in a Viking way, her head high. Her body was so tense that each muscle was sore, she wanted only one thing, to escape from her own body, and to let her soul fly up to Berk. She prayed the gods that Hiccup wouldn't come, and see that. Although he would eventually know...

Nero was looking at her with a broad smile, Flavius, him, was gripping the armrests of his seat and was livid. She didn't count the lashes, she knew that the pain would eventually prevent her from keeping track. While she faltered, she heard Nero order to two soldiers to maintain her. She felt her forces abandoning her, she didn't cry, all her energy was focused on the fact of not screaming. The voices became muffled, the sounds disappeared, and then the world went black.

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When he stretched out his hand toward her face, he realized he was shaking. Octavius was outside watching, Lucia and Shailaine moved away, it was dark, a lantern was installed next to the coat, and Astrid was lying on her stomach, unconscious. He tenderly parted a strand of hair that covered her face and took a deep breath. His gaze then carried on her back.

It had been hours, she hadn't been treated immediately, she had been transported in the dorm, and slaves relayed to watch over her. Flavius eventually asked Lucia to go treat Astrid, but Nero had ensured that she could do it as late as possible. Lucia had cut Astrid tunic to have a look, to take care of her, and she was preparing bandages. Her back was a giant wound, the blood had dried and looked dark, and lacerations were bright red.

Hiccup felt tears stinging his eyes, he clenched his jaw, and could hardly swallow. He looked around him, discovering the dormitory, discovering the faces of those who appeared to be friends with Astrid. Kaleina was sitting opposite to him, at the other side of the layer, and she was holding on of Astrid's hand. She and Shailaine had first eyed him with curiosity, their gaze lingering on his prosthesis. When Lucia undertook to clean the wound, Astrid began to push wailing moans, still unconscious. Hiccup gently stroked her head leaning towards her.

"I'm here, Astrid, hold on, juâ€|just hold on my loveâ€|" he whispered on her ear. He closed his eyes and put his forehead against hers.

"You have to hold on, youâ€|I love you, you have to open your eyes, please, just open your eyes, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry..."

His voice died and he had to hold back a sob. Lucia applied gently a thick green paste.

"It's numbing and antiseptic..." she explained in a low voice.

Hiccup sat up and wiped his eyes furtively.

"You loved, she spoke much you..." Kaleina said gently with a sad smile.

"Your wife is amazing" whispered Shailaine. Her heart is full of light... I owe her so much..."

Hiccup wanted to say something, to thank them, but the words were stuck in his throat. Then he nodded his head. Yes, she was amazing. Strong, courageous, generous... Shailaine had told him what had happened, how Astrid had undoubtedly saved her daughter, at the risk of her life.

Astrid groaned again. Her lips were dry and her voice hoarse. Hiccup felt new tears rolling down his cheeks, he ignored them and squeezed her hand.

"She'll need time to recover" Lucia said with a sigh. Shailaine and she began to wrap the bandage around her rib cage, thus covering her back. The bandage immediately tinted red with blood and Hiccup closed his eyes to try to regain his composure.

"I'll kill these men..." he hissed, his voice low and dangerous.

He had never sought to kill, Toothless and he had always ensured to aim just without trying deliberately to injure anyone, they never went to the kill. During the battle against Drago, he had tried to arrest him without violence until the very end. And he realized that sometimes violence was necessary in their world. The rage that seethed in his veins seemed to transcend all his senses. He could only see, hear and feel this destructive fury. Astrid had been taken away from him and then she had been tortured, and it made him mad. He would ensure that those responsible would be punished, he swore to the gods that he would show them what happened if someone messed up with those he loved.

"I'm done, I'm going to get her water" Lucia announced.

But someone cleared his throat, startling them. They turned and froze. Octavius was there, looking perplexed and worried. Beside him, a man in a toga was facing them, and despite the shadows drawn on his face by the low light of the lantern, Hiccup recognized one of the Romans who had been watching at the torture. He jumped on his legs, his fists clenched. Kaleina was looking at them with wide-eyes and seemed terrified, Shailaine looked like a trapped bunny, only Lucia seemed serene. The eyes of the man landed on Astrid, he seemed hurt, as if he was suffering. Then his gaze focused on Hiccup, watching him with what looked like envy. His eyes swept to his prosthesis, to his silhouette, then stopping at his face.

"Who are you?" Hiccup growled, making a step forward. Flavius raised an eyebrow.

"Do you know who you are talking with? I'm here at home, it is for me to ask you this question!"

"I'm Hiccup, Astrid's husband!"

He knew he wasn't careful but he couldn't help the protectiveness he was feeling. Flavius' face went through many emotions. Surprise, sadness, bitterness.

"Master Flavius means you no harm" Lucia intervened, putting a soothing hand on Hiccup's arm.

He looked at her with amazement.

"He didn't help her, he was there, watching her being tortured by that coward and he didn't help her! He could have stopped them!" Hiccup exploded, showing Astrid with his arm.

Octavius looked at him as if he had lost his mind, but Hiccup didn't care. Nothing mattered anymore, being alone surrounded by Romans, risking his life. He didn't care. The only thing that counted was this anger that consumed him. He wanted to hit this Roman, he wanted to evacuate this overflow of fury, regret and sorrow.

"It was that or she would die" finally replied Flavius. My brother isn't as merciful as I am, I had no choice..."

"Why should I believe you?"

Flavius frowned and sighed, without finding a valid argument.

"Flavius is a good man" said Lucia.

"How can you say such a thing? You are captive, you are a slave!" cried Hiccup.

"Vikings don't have slaves?" asked Flavius, raising his eyebrows.

"We don't have slaves in our island" Hiccup replied.

"Oh, yes, it's true, this mysterious island... I'll be curious to visit it..."

"Isn't it what you have planned?" Hiccup retorted with contempt.

Flavius looked confused, and glared at him blankly.

"I don't understand" What are you talking about?" he asked cautiously.

"I'm talking about your covenant with a murderer, a criminal fearing neither god nor man!"

"Look, I don't know what you're talking about! I just came to see if... If she's fine..."

Hiccup had a joyless laugh which didn't look like him. He felt at breaking point, he felt that his heart was bare and raw.

"If she's fine? In your opinion? Does she look fine?"

Flavius' face hardened.

"I didn't want it... Who is this criminal you are talking about?"

Hiccup tensed, his eyes became darker.

"I was talking about Drago Bluvist, the man with whom you want to combine you for overthrow your Emperor and invade our island! This man has... He killed my father... And he destroyed a part of my village..."

Flavius frowned, he seemed suddenly angry.

"Those are very serious charges, which would mean that my brother plots in my back to take power over our Emperor? This is absurd!"

Lucia brought a hand to her mouth, shuddering.

"Do you mean that you're not aware of what's happening here?" asked Hiccup with suspicion.

Flavius shook his head.

"I'm not, and I don't know if I should believe you... What tells me that you're not trying to harm us, you are Vikings, and your people don't have a good reputation!"

Flavius seemed inclined to believe him, however. This wouldn't be surprising coming from his brother, whose thirst for power seemed never to be satisfied. And this young man looked sincere and spoke with his heart, he inspired confidence, even if somewhere at the bottom of it, he wanted to hate him to possess what he wanted the most...

"Astrid heard them talking" Hiccup added.

This seemed to be enough to convince Flavius.

"Are you alone?" asked Flavius.

"Yes" lied Hiccup.

He preferred to keep secret the presence of Toothless, their friends and the other dragons. He might need an effect of surprise if things go wrong. Astrid suddenly uttered a cry of pain. She was regaining consciousness, then feeling the unbearable pain of her injuries. In a fraction of a second, Hiccup was kneeling beside her, a hand holding hers, the other gently caressing her hair while he tenderly kissed her on the temple.

"Astrid, I'm right here my love..." he whispered.

He had forgotten the presence of the others, his conversation with Flavius, only Astrid mattered.

"I'm going to fetch her water and some herbs to infuse for the pain!" said Lucia, leaving hastily.

Her eyes shuddered, and then opened slowly. She grimaced, a tear



escaping from her eyes, breaking his heart, he felt immediately a ball choking his throat.

"Hiâ€¦Hiccup?"

"I'm here, I'm here, I won't let you...I'll never let you go again, I'll never let anyone hurt you a..againâ€¦"

His voice was hoarse, she closed her eyes and swallowed with difficulty. Her throat was so dry, she was thirsty.

"You'll have water, don't move, I promise you, you'll have waterâ€¦"

"Itâ€¦ It hurtsâ€¦" she breathed, opening her eyes full of tears again. Hiccup rested his forehead against hers.

"I know... I'm so sorry, I'm so so sorry Astrid, I... I was getting mad, Iâ€¦ Iâ€¦my beloved, forgive me..."

His voice broke. Astrid coughed and grimaced before speaking with a hoarse voice.

"Hiccup... Stop it... I love you...It's not your faultâ€¦ I love you..."

Hiccup took a shaky breath.

"I love you too, you don't know how much..."

Flavius had witnessed this exchange with an indecipherable expression on his face. He ended up looking away and he staring at the floor. Then, he said.

"I know what we're going to doâ€¦"

## 15. Chapter 15

**\*\*Hi guys! I'm in a hurry but I wanted to update before leaving! I hope you'll enjoy this chapter, I'm still sorry if there are some mistakes, there are surely, I don't know why but it was quite hard to translate this time! Anyway, thank you to all of you for the reviews, I promise an individual answer for each of you with the next chapter! \*\***

**\*\*And as a little gift, for the person who will let me my 100\*\*\*\*th\*\*\*\* review, you'll be allowed to ask me to write a one shot, with Hiccstrid inside of course. \*\***

**\*\*Enjoy and reviews are always my drug! Thank youuuu!\*\***

**\*\*Take care!\*\***

**\*\*XXX\*\***

When they were twenty, the winter had been exceptionally hard. The icy wind blew relentlessly sweeping Berk without mercy, bringing snow and frozen each day and each night. Most of the inhabitants had taken refuge in the great Hall, human and animal bodies gave off enough

heat to keep them warm, fires snored in hearths, Stoick ensured that they will remain lit. He walked his gaze on his people, all helping each other, cooking together, some were watching over children, occupying them with stories about the gods, others were milking yaks, while others took care of the makeshift chicken coop at the bottom of the room. He was proud of Berk, of seeing dragons walking peacefully, relighting the fires, letting the coldest natures snuggling against their hot and scaly skin.\_

\_But those which he was most proud of were his son and his friends. When wood was missing, the youths organized expeditions to the outside, braving the elements to supply the village with wood they then dry with the dragons. Hiccup had to fight hard to convince his father to let him out, but he had succeeded when the first fire was extinguished due to lack of wood.\_

\_Initially, Hiccup wanted to go alone, Toothless was fast and moving with ease even in extreme climatic conditions. But Astrid hadn't let him any choice, she would go with him, whether he likes it or not, and in the end, Snotlout, Fishlegs and the twins had joined them.

—

\_Despite the heat in the great hall, however, the first sick made their appearance. Soon, Gothi had isolated part of the patients in a remote corner of the great Hall, providing little care she was able to give them without fresh herbs around.\_

\_Hiccup chewed nervously his lips, he knew what he wanted to do, but this output would be much more risky than a single expedition in search of wood. Gothi had explained to them that the herbs she needed were on Outcast Island. She rarely had it in stock, because this kind of influenza occurred rarely on Berk.\_

\_Hiccup eventually talked to his father, the exchanges were heated, but Hiccup had been able to convince him, one more time. Astrid had wanted to accompany him, but Stoick had asked her to assist Gothi to take care of the sick, that she had agreed with a resigned sigh. She had kissed Hiccup on his cheek, and then he had placed his forehead against hers to look at her in the eyes. \_

"\_Come back to meâ€|" she whispered.\_

"\_Everything you want miladyâ€|" said Hiccup with a smile.\_

\_The expedition hadn't been easy. The wind seemed to take great pleasure in trying to unseat him, his eyelashes were frozen and he couldn't feel his nose nor the tip of his fingers. Fortunately, Toothless was hot enough to keep him from freezing entirely on-site.\_

\_Outcast Island was deserted, since the rallying of Alvin after the defeat of Dagur, Alvin now travelled north, living of what he could fish. However, Hiccup had to avoid a horde of wild monstrous nightmares, particularly surly. Then they had landed and he had followed the instructions of Gothi, to find the herbs in question, which looked more like old dead cheeks, frozen under a thick layer of frost, branches that he had to scrape it off with his hands, afraid that Toothless' fire does burn everything. Once his bag full, Toothless and he had flown back to Berk. Several hours had elapsed since his departure the same morning, the sun was already setting on

the horizon.\_

\_They rushed in the Great Hall, closing the doors behind them with the help of other men so much wind was violent.\_

\_Then he had rushed to his father in great discussion with Gothi.\_

"\_Dad! Gothi! I have the herbs!" he exclaimed waving his satchel.\_

"\_Good job son, well done you two..."\_

\_But there wasn't the usual heat in the voice of his father. He seemed preoccupied, Gothi and he had dark faces.\_

"\_What's going on?" asked Hiccup.\_

\_Gothi and Stoick exchanged a look. Gobber arrived and laid a hand on Hiccup's shoulder, who felt his heart miss a beat. Something was wrongâ€¦|\_

"\_The epidemic worsened son, explained Stoick in grave tones. A young girl has developed a severe form of the disease, she's... She diedâ€¦|"\_

\_Hiccup's eyes widened. Gothi sighed, took the satchel, and disappeared behind the curtain which isolated the sick from the others. Hiccup was then able to hear the sobs of several people and finally noticed how the great Hall was silent, all looked devastated, some were crying, others were discussing in a low voice. Toothless purred with concern and sadness, passing his head between him and Gobber.\_

"\_I... I... This is horrible... How are the others?"\_

\_The look exchanged between his father and his mentor did nothing to reassure him.\_

"\_There is something else, son... This girl, it was Astrid who looked after her..."\_

\_Any color deserted his face while his heart began to beat wildly in his chest.\_

"\_Where is she?"\_

"\_Sonâ€¦|"\_

\_Stoick looked pained and unable to finish his sentence.\_

"\_The lass, she caught a severe form of influenza... She fainted in the middle of the day, she hasn't regained consciousness since..."\_

\_Hiccup had the impression that a frozen fluid had replaced the blood in his veins. He stared at his father with a horrified look, and then he began to rush behind the curtain, but Stoick held him back.\_

"\_Son! If you go there, you could get sick!"\_

"\_I want to see Astrid!" Hiccup screamed, struggling. "I want to see her!"\_

"\_Hiccup, I understand how you feel, but as unique heir of Berk, you have to think about your people first and foremost, if you came to disappear, it is..."\_

"\_You don't understand, if she died, that's what would happen, I'd disappear!" Hiccup hissed, finally pulling away from his father.\_

\_Stoick pinched the top of his nose, closing his eyes, and sighed.\_

"\_Son, you can't do anything more, Gothi and the other women are already taking care of her..."\_

"\_I'm not leaving her alone, I want to... I have to see her..."\_

\_Stoick stared at his son, and sighed.\_

"\_You're far too stubborn for you own good!"\_

"\_I'm taking after you!" replied Hiccup.\_

"\_Fine!" Fine, just go!"\_

\_Hiccup seemed suddenly uncertain, terrified at the thought of what he would find behind the curtain. But his need to see her got the upper hand, and he entered the isolated part of the great hall.\_

\_The sick were aligned along the wall, surrounded mostly by one or two relatives. Women came and went between them, distributing water and infusions. All greeted him with a nod, he saw some looks slip stealthily to the farthest corner of the area, and then he rushed there without hesitation.\_

\_There were two elongated people, away from the other patients. A teenager Hiccup acknowledged as being Bucket's nephew, and Astrid. He swallowed with difficulty and approached slowly. Astrid was pale, her skin was grayish and her lips white. Her hair was scattered around her head, many were pasted on her forehead by the sweat due to fever.\_

\_If it wasn't for her breath, low but hoarse, he could have believed that she was dead... Suddenly, he closed his eyes, as if the single idea had hit him in the stomach. He slowly tried to catch his breath, then reopened his eyes to kneel beside her. He creased her forehead from the tip of his fingers, immediately removing his hand. She was burning. He looked around and spotted a bowl of fresh water with laundry inside. He pressed the tissue and gently wiped her face.\_

"\_Astrid... Astrid, I'm here..."\_

\_He didn't understand. That morning, she was fine, she was as radiant

as usual, and a few hours later, she was dying? Nothing made sense, he had the impression that his life, their future, their promises of happiness were escaping between his fingers as if he had tried to retain water in his handâ€¦|\_

"\_Hiccupâ€¦|" Ingrid said quietly.\_

\_Astrid's mother came to kneel beside him. They remained silent for a moment.\_

"\_Gothi said that the infusion of herbs that you have brought will help her but will not cure her unlike the others... She... She said that Astrid is very weak and that it is now her fight, it is up to her to decide if she wants to stay or follow the Valkyries to Valhalla..."\_

\_She fell silent, and began to sob quietly. Hiccup felt dizzy, he clasped his fists so tight that his knuckles were white. He leaned toward Astrid and breathed into her ear.\_

"\_Astrid, I know that you hear me, then listen to me, I forbid you to leave us, okay, you can't do that, you can't leave me, youâ€¦|you just can't... I love you, Astrid, you have to fight and heal and come back to me, and... and... don't leave me..."\_

\_Ingrid laid a hand on his shoulder, wiping her eyes with the other.\_

"\_Sheâ€¦|She loved you so much you know..."\_

\_Loved? Hiccup shook his head.\_

"\_I love her, and she loves me, and she'll be fine, she'll heal... She's Astrid..."\_

\_Ingrid nodded, but she seemed uncertain and still hopeless.\_

"\_You should go rest Hiccup, she finally said. You have spent the day flying looking for these herbs, you must be exhausted."\_

\_Exhausted, he was indeed, and yet he had never felt so alert than at this moment. Nothing would move him from Astrid's sides.\_

"\_I'm staying there, I keep an eye on her, go to sleep on it, have some rest..."\_

\_Ingrid hesitated, then nodded and joined the Great hall. She had understood that nothing could move Hiccup away from her daughter, and she was glad he was here.\_

\_The days following were a succession of hope, disappointment, heartbreak, of terror. Her fever had made her delirious, sometimes he leaned above her, the closer he could, just to feel her breath on his skin and make sure she was still breathing. The worst was when she began to convulse. Hiccup was set to call for help, completely terrified, paralyzed by fear. Gothi asked him to retain Astrid on the side, what he had done, his face dripping with tears. Never did he have been that terrified in his entire life. He would make nightmares of this for months, he knew it. When the teenager alongside Astrid ended up dying in turn, Hiccup closed his eyes and bit his fist until

blood to not yell of anger and dismay. The storm eventually passes, and Astrid was transported at Gothi's.\_

\_Hiccup barely ate and slept only per minutes, his father, and then Gobber, and then Ingrid, all of them had tried to convince him to go to have some rest and to eat something, in vain. Ingrid then brought him meals, he barely touched it. Every day, he spoke to Astrid, talking about what they would do together as soon as she would be cured, telling her about their marriage, their children, their travels. Every day, he watched on her face creased with pain for any sign of improvement. Then one morning, while he was asleep for a few minutes, his head next to hers, his arm around her waist, he felt a hand almost furtively stroking his hair. He straightened, wide-eyed, and saw Astrid, pale, her eyes surrounded with dark circles, but peaceful, and above all, awakened. She smiled weakly and Hiccup felt all his defenses collapsing. He crushed her in his embrace, holding her tight against him, nestling his face against her belly. He cried quietly, while Astrid kept stroking his hair with gentleness.\_

"\_Hiccupâ€| What happened?"\_

\_Her voice was hoarse, he gave her water, helping her, and he eventually rectify himself, he wiped his tears and took a deep breath. His voice was still shaking when he spoke.\_

"\_You were sickâ€| Very sickâ€|You caught a severe form of influenza and... and... I thought..."\_

\_His voice died in his throat and he closed his eyes. Astrid took one of his hands in hers and squeezed it weakly.\_

"\_I'm fine Hiccup..."\_

\_Hiccup looked at her, drinking every detail of her face that he loved so much. Yes she was fine, she would even be better and better, and he would ensure that this does not change anymore.\_

Hiccup knew he had to do it fast, but seeing Astrid on this mat, suffering, reminded him the painful memories that he would have preferred to forget. He wondered what he had done to the gods to have to see the people he loved suffer. He pulled himself together, pressed by Octavius and Lucia.

"Men are ready, announced Octavius, we must be fast..."

Hiccup nodded and gently took Astrid in his arms, barely daring to touch her back. She didn't react, thanks to the herbal tea Lucia had given her, which had a sedative effect. Lucia approached him and tenderly stroked Astrid's hair.

"Poor thing, she's a precious soulâ€| Take care of her..."

"I willâ€| You could come with us..." Hiccup said quietly.

Shailaine was holding her daughter against her, Kaleina and they were preparing to follow Hiccup. He knew that Astrid wouldn't have wanted to leave them behind, he was grateful for the way they took care of her throughout the day. Lucia shook her head with a sad smile.

"My place is here..."

Hiccup couldn't understand, he hardly kept himself from protesting and sighed instead. Lucia looked at him in his eyes.

"And if something happens to you? I will never forgive myself!"

"I'm going to be fine... "

Hiccup shook his head.

"How can you know! How can you trust him to the point to say here as a slave?"

Lucia observed him with an indecipherable air.

"I have no children... My mother died a long time ago... Flavius is the only family I have left" she said softly, as if she feared someone might hear it.

"You? What? Flavius is..."

"My brother. He is my brother yes... We have the same father... My mother was a slave, reduced to slavery following a campaign in the West... A long time ago, while he hadn't yet married the mother of Nero and Flavius, my... father was drunk, and met my mother while she was working in the garden... He... He had? Well, you guess what he did to her, and a few months later I was born... He never recognized me as his daughter, but when he has had children with his wife, they learned who I was, and then Flavius was the only one to be nice with me... He is a good man, my boy, he suffered far too much, he loved like you love Astrid and and he lost this love in awful circumstances... He is a man tortured by his grief but he's a good man, just put yourself in his place..."

Hiccup nodded weakly. Several times, especially these days, he thought about what would happen if Astrid was gone forever. And even if he was thinking about his daughter, his mother, his friends and his people, he could only see an ocean of tears, only depths of suffering and misery, he wasn't unable to see anything without Astrid, just an abyss without end in which he would undoubtedly sink. He could see a mourning life in which he would evolve as a ghost.

The night was cool, he shivered slightly and held Astrid closer in his arms. They had to reach the beach as discreetly as possible, a boat expect them to lead to Rome. For Flavius, Hiccup was going to make sure Astrid was safe, the Roman was unaware that Kaleina, Shailaine and her daughter accompanied him, he was unaware that he would actually let them with his friends on trader Johann's ship. But Hiccup would keep his word and would follow Flavius' plan. Flavius had pretended his departure for the North of the country, that same morning, as planned, before posting his men and himself in the Imperial quarters, waiting for any sign of his brother and his mysterious partner. They didn't know what to expect, and most importantly, Hiccup knew that Flavius was certainly not expecting dragons coming into play. He would duly deal with that, for the moment, the priority was to leave the island without being noticed. Octavius was coming with them, and he had managed to convince the other Smiths to distract the soldiers, to make them drink

even...

The silence that prevailed was almost oppressive. The other slaves were sleeping, Astrid had been transported in Lucia's room, twenty-four hours had passed since that she had been whipped, and she had been unconscious almost all the day.

They didn't meet anyone, Octavius was leading them in the dark, Shailaine was carrying her daughter so she didn't stumble, and they could only hear the squeal of gravels and from time to time, a rock rolling. When he felt his prosthesis dig a little more into soil, he sighed with relief. They were on the beach, and the boat was there, dimly-lit by the moon. Hiccup wanted to run, rowing with all his strength to Rome, to know Astrid away and safe, to see Toothless and his friends. But while he gently deposited Astrid into the boat, her head resting on Kaleina's lap, he heard Octavius curse.

He turned and saw, his heart racing, a figure coming towards them, reeling, carrying a torch, which soon began to illuminate his face. Titus, the Chief. He looked slightly drunk, and when his dog saw them, he tensed immediately and began to tuck yup his chops.

"I knew that something was wrong with you, crippled! chuckled Titus. I knew that you hide your game! So like that, you want to bring slaves with you? It is what the Vikings do, isn't this, take what doesn't belong to them?"

Hiccup faced him, a few meters between them, the dog took a step forward to intimidate him, but Hiccup didn't move. His heart was pounding wildly. This man had flogged Astrid, relishing each wound she had, enjoying each tear escaping her eyes. A thirst for vengeance as he had never felt overwhelmed him, stronger than everything else. He wanted to hurt him, to see him suffer as he had dared to hurt Astrid, but part of him was screaming that revenge led to nothing, that hurt had never repaired anything. If Titus warned the soldiers, it was their entire plan which could fail, and he couldn't allow it. Octavius was standing next to him, he seemed to wait for directives and Hiccup's mind began to race at full speed.

"Give me back the girl, the blonde one" and I'll let you leave" Titus said eventually, his voice slurred and his eyes glassy.

Hiccup clenched his teeth and squeezed his fists. He knew perfectly what Titus wanted from Astrid and it made him furious. Just thinking about what he could do to her was making him sick.

"You know that won't happen, never." he said in a calm tone which contrasted strikingly with the whirlwind of emotions that twirled in his chest since Astrid's kidnaping.

"You have surely other women if you are what Drago said you are, a chief" Titus insisted, launching a hungry look to the boat where Astrid was. "Give me her and you'll be free, I want her..."

His eyes were shining with obvious lust and desire, and Hiccup felt a violent urge to hit him, but he had to stay still.

"She's the one for me, she's my wife and never will you touch her" he growled.



The gesture of Titus was barely noticeable, but the dog leapt immediately barking furiously, ready to close his teeth on Hiccup. But Hiccup dodged and the jaw closed on his prosthesis in a snap that rang around them. Titus chuckled, but, surprised, the dog released his grip, and Octavius took the opportunity to kick him in the sides, sending him rolling on the ground. The dog whined but recovered immediately in a position to attack, his teeth shining in the light of the torch. Octavius took a step forward, but Hiccup raised a hand.

"No, wait!"

Octavius glared at with awe.

"This dog is a monster, it deserves to be beaten to death for all the people he terrorized and had bitten! A man ended amputee because of him!" he exclaimed.

Hiccup didn't answer and turned to the dog. He looked at his eyes, dark and cruel, his jaw upturned and menacing.

And suddenly he was fifteen years old and he was facing a dragon frightened and hurt and angry. A dragon who did feel the same emotions he was feeling. He remembered the words of his mother, after the death of his father. Good dragons do bad things under the influence of bad people... This memory was painful, his heart squeezed painfully each time he was thinking about it, but he also remembered who had helped him to forgive Toothless for what he had done. It was his mother's words and the warmth of Astrid's body as she was huddled against him, which had chasing out the anger to leave only the love for his best friend.

He squatted and held out a hand to the dog. Octavius held his breath while the rictus on the face of Titus turned into a grimace.

"It's okay bud, I'm not your enemy, I don't want to hurt you and I know you don't want to hurt me, and it's going to be fine..." he said in a low and reassuring voice.

The dog growled again, Hiccup looked away, turning his head aside and keeping his hand outstretched. His heart was beating so hard in his ears that he barely heard Titus screaming, directing his dog to attack him. The dog, taken aback, stopped scolding. He sniffed with curiosity in the direction of Hiccup, before taking a few steps forward to sniff his hand. He whined plaintively, Hiccup turned his head to look at him and put a hand on his head.

"It's okay, bud, you are a good dog..."

"What? It's impossible! Attack! Attack him!"

As the dog didn't react, yelping with benevolence, allowing Hiccup to caress him, Titus took a step back, and then two, before turning on his heels and running away. But he was so drunk that he stumbled at every step, and Octavius was soon to catch him. When he returned, he dragged the body of the chief with a satisfied smile. As Hiccup stared at him, with wide eyes, he rolled his eyes.

"He's just knocked out, we should take him with us..."

Hiccup nodded, and followed him. Octavius was in charge of the boat, he knew these waters by heart, and in the dark, it was more prudent to have him driving the boat. Hiccup climbed into the boat and took Kaleina's place, keeping Astrid pressed against him.

He tenderly stroked her hair, he wanted so much to talk to her, to kiss her, to hug her like forever, but he knew that, given her injuries, the infusion Lucia gave her was a good thing. At least, she wasn't suffering. He didn't know how long it would take to clear, he simply hoped that they would be away from Rome when it would do.

**\*\*XXX\*\***

Snotlout passed a hand across his face with an exasperated sigh.

"Toothless, it's the sixth time that you flip the barrel of kipper! Hookfang may take my fingers for kipper with the smell!"

As an answer, Toothless glared at him, not impressed. He shook his tail, sending an old rusty helmet in the direction of Snotlout, who ducked just in time.

"Toothless!" He cried. "I know you miss Hiccup, but this isn't a reason for to come after me! You have to stay here!"

Toothless turned his back and sat down facing the wall pretending yawning.

"Stupid spoiled useless lizard!" Snotlout muttered, walking toward the exit. He hadn't reached the door that he received a mug right in the head.

"Aouch!" He shouted, his hand massaging his head, turning to glare at Toothless. The dragon laughed and ignored him, Snotlout grabbed the mug and was about to throw it to the dragon, when suddenly, Toothless turned his head toward the door, his eyes wide open. He straightened his ears, began to purr, and in a few jumps, he was out of the room. Snotlout ran after him.

"Toothless! No, Toothless! You have to stay inside! Toothless!"

The dragon began to make joyful leaps, his tongue lolling, knocking down Fishlegs in his path and he began to purr looking towards the sea. When he saw the dragon on the deck of his boat, Johann nearly fainted. Only the twins didn't react, both asleep, supported one another.

But nothing could stop Toothless. Hiccup was back.

## 16. Chapter 16

**\*\*I'm so sorry for being late, I've been so busy with friends and my daughters and everything else, the last few days have been crazy, in a good way, but still, I'm exhausted!\*\***

**\*\*Thank you so much for the reviews, it's very hard to translate so each review is an encouragement, it means a lot!\*\***

**\*\*Jo: thank you so much! The fight is coming in the next chapter!\*\***

**\*\*Felix: you're right, you just have to enjoy each day as a gift! Thank you very much for reviewing!\*\***

**\*\*Fault: you get it, the storm is coming, but for now, just enjoy! Thank you very much!\*\***

**\*\*Quarter: thank you, I'm always glad to touch my readers with my words, it means the world to me! You're right, my French version is popular, but I think every reader is important, so even if the English version was read by only one person, this person would deserve that I continue to translate, I love writing, I love English even if my English isn't perfect, everything is about sharing. Thank you very very much!\*\***

**\*\*Lorde: you are just SO sweet! You made me laugh, I can't count every review but anyway, thank you so much, you are amazing!\*\***

**\*\*I hope you'll enjoy this chapter, and please, reviews are needed!\*\***

**\*\*Take care!\*\***

**\*\*XXX \*\***

Kaleina, Shailaine and Saoirse were crumpled in a corner, their eyes wide with fear staring at Toothless. He leaped, licked Hiccup lovingly, before pushing him, growling at him, then turning his back to him, before purring with concern sniffing Astrid. Hiccup was somehow trying to calm the excitement of his dragon, who seemed as happy to have him back, as unhappy after being left behind. Octavius was paralyzed, supporting himself by gripping a wall, hands clinging to a barrel. Hiccup glanced at them and smiled nervously.

"He isn't that exited usually" He said in a vain attempt to make the situation look more normal.

But all of them threw him a terrified look, as if they feared that he was going to become a dragon and to devour them in a snap of jaw.

"Hiccup, what happened?" asked Fishlegs, watching with anxiety the newcomers and Astrid, unconscious, lying on her stomach on the layer of Johann.

"What happened to her?" asked Rufnutt , did they hurt her?"

She was switching her lace in one hand to the other, her furious eyes fixing Octavius as if she thought he was personally guilty. Hiccup sighed. Between calming Toothless and calming his friends, he didn't know what was the most difficult. Besides that, he wasn't comfortable with the idea of keeping the chief prisoner, attached in the shed with Boromir.

"They're friends, they helped me to get Astrid out of there..." he said before turning again to Toothless, who had put his head gently on Astrid's legs.

"Toothless, buddy, I'm sorry..."

Toothless used his tail to swip Hiccup's legs, causing him to fall over backwards with a thud when his head hit the wooden floor. Hiccup groaned, rubbing the back of his skull, and stood with the help of Fishlegs.

"Toothless, I had no choice, I couldn't take you with me..."

The dragon snarled, making Astrid move and moan. He immediately lifted his head and purred with concern. He turned his head to Hiccup, observed his face exhausted and distraught, his red eyes and the traces of tears that had drawn furrows on his dirty skin. He went to snuggle against him, Hiccup closed his arms around his neck and nestled his face against him with a trembling sigh. He was on the verge of bursting, he could feel it, but he had to be strong, he couldn't let go, this was not the time, there were still so many things to do...

"Hiccup, what happened? What happened to Astrid?" asked Fishlegs, his eyes wide with worry.

Hiccup swallowed and lifted his head, but instead of responding to his friend, he turned to Octavius, Kaleina, Shailaine and Saoirse.

"Youâ€¦ You control a monster? Are you a demon?" Octavius spat in an accusatory tone.

"What did he say?" asked Snotlout, frowning.

"He's not a monster, he's my best friend..."

"He's a dragonâ€¦ I thought you were different from your people, I thought you weren't a barbarian like them!"

"Dragons are not monsters! Toothless is my best friend, the most loyal you could ask for, he saved my life more than once!"

As to back up his words, he stroked the base of the dragon's neck, Toothless purred with contentment before rolling merrily at the feet of Hiccup.

"Draâ€¦ Dragons are not supposed to exist! They are legends!"

Octavius' voice seemed less certain, he watched the dragon behaving like a big cat and didn't know what to think and what to do with the irrational fear he felt.

Shailaine stood up then. Without a word, she approached Toothless, who stopped and observed her with curiosity. She seemed frightened but didn't seem surprised.

"I've seen dragons, a long time ago... I thought that they had disappeared..." she said.

"Okay, what's going on? What did they say?" Snotlout asked again.

"Yeah, we don't understand anything!" Tuffnut added.

"You never understand anything!" Ruffnut replied.

"Laterâ€|" Hiccup retorted, still staring at Shailaine.

She handed a hand toward Toothless with hesitation, before bring it over her chest with fear.

"Is heâ€|" Tamed?"

Hiccup shook his head.

"He's my friend, he trusts me and I trust him..."

She smiled with uncertainty and turned her head to look at Hiccup.

"You're not like the others Vikings..."

It was a statement more than a question. He shrugged with a smile.

"I guess we're not... Do you know others Vikings?"

Shailaine's face fell, she sat back with her daughter and held the little girl against her.

"Yes I doâ€|" she eventually answered.

Hiccup frowned but didn't insist. He transferred his attention to Octavius, who seemed slightly more relaxed.

"Octavius, you are my friend, if I led you here, it is because I trust you... All this must remain secret..."

The blacksmith didn't reply immediately, his gaze ranging from Toothless to Hiccup. Then he sighed and nodded his head without a word. He wasn't totally convinced, but he had decided to continue to trust Hiccup. At this stage, there was no really choice left to him.

Relieved, Hiccup turned to his friends.

"I have to go back there with Toothless... You are going to leave Rome immediately, you have to go back to Berk as quickly as possible..."

"What? And leave you there?" Fishlegs cried, horrified.

"I'll catch you up, but I have something to do first..."

Snotlout shook his head in disbelief.

"Are you serious? We came to find Astrid, and you found her, why would you stay?"

"I gave my word to the Roman who helped us..."

Snotlout snorted, still shaking his head angrily, but didn't answer. When a Viking gave his word, it was sacred and he knew that there was no use to argue. Hiccup seemed serious enough to convince them that the situation was bad.

"Fine, we come with you, we want to visit Rome! Wait, it's Rome here, isn't it?" Tuffnut said, rubbing his chin.

"No, I need you back to Berk..."

Harold knelt next to Astrid and kissed her temple, lingering to breathe her smell, his eyes shut. He would have liked to talk to her before leaving, to be sure she would be fine, to plunge his gaze into hers, for what could be the last time.

"I love you, so muchâ€¦" he whispered in her ear.

Then he straightened.

"She had been whipped..."

His voice was low, broken, but his words resounded in the room. His friends gasped, a terrified silence settled. All were looking at him with the same shocked expression. They had dozens of questions, but they knew that it would have to wait...

"She... She took an infusion that keeps her unconscious for now, justâ€¦ Make sure that her wounds don't get infected..."

Fishlegs nodded, he knew a lot about medicinal plants, and Johann always had it in his cargo.

"Berk is in grave danger, Drago... Drago is stronger than the last time that we have met him... Get to the sea, dragons will join you and they will be able to tow the boat to Berk then...If... If I don't come back, Astrid will be the chief, I count on you so that nothing happens to her... I count on you to defend Berk..."

He had never considered the idea of dying away from Berk. But he didn't know what to expect, there were so many things he ignored, he didn't know if Drago would be there or if he had already set the cap on Berk. He didn't know if he would have the chance to see his daughter again and to give her a name with Astrid.

Fishlegs, his face tensed, approached and took his friend in his arms. The twins exchanged a look and joined the hug.

"You'd better come back, do you know what she would do to us if you don't?" Ruffnut asked. Hiccup laughed weakly. Their eyes turned to Snotlout, who had remained motionless.

"Hugs are not for real men!" he exclaimed, before climbing on the back of Toothless.

"My thing is action, weapongs, you know, manly thingsâ€¦"

"Snotlout, whatâ€¦"

"I come with you, just to be sure your chief's skinny ass comes back complete!"

Hiccup rolled his eyes but he smiled gratefully at his cousin, who feigned indifference, while Toothless was glaring at him indignantly, ready to swing him across the room.

"It's okay bud, he comes with us..." Hiccup intervened, patting his friend's neck. He turned to Fishlegs, who was nervously tritulating his hands.

"Fishlegs, if Astrid wakes, I count on you to keep her on board, make sure she stays safeâ€¦ Take care of her, please..."

Hiccup's voice shook. He had just found her back and he already had to leave her. He hated it, he hated what was happening to them. He turned on his heels and left the room, his heart heavy and painful.

They took advantage of some clouds hiding the moon to fly quietly to the imperial palace. Certainly, the guards did not expect an attack from the sky. However, Hiccup was holding his breath. Flavius plan was simple. After feigning his departure to the North of the country, he had arrested a man from Nero's guards, questioning him until he confessed that an attack was scheduled the same evening, and that some of the troops of Nero had left in the afternoon in the direction of the northern kingdoms. They therefore had to act quickly. Save the Emperor and chase the troops who certainly joined the ranks of Drago to attack Berk. They had to stop them. Flavius didn't know about Toothless, Hiccup didn't know how he would react, but he hoped that he would have enough trust to understand that the dragon was indispensable if Drago had actually lent a dragon to Nero. Flavius had provided a plan, explaining him that he would ensure that the soldiers would not be a problem on their way. The corridors were indeed strangely deserted, their footsteps echoed ominously around them and Toothless rumbled with concern, going with reluctance.

"So, if we meet soldiers, what are we supposed to do?" Snotlout whispered, his fingers tightening and loosening nervously around his sword.

Hiccup moistened his dry lips before answering.

"To improviseâ€¦"

"That's your plan?" grunted Snotlout.

He had no time to add anything. A terrible roar resounded, shaking the walls and the marble ground under their feet. Hiccup felt his hair stand up on his neck, and Toothless began to growl, a blue glow immediately shining on his nostrils and his back. They heard screams of panic, sounds of runs, soldiers suddenly appeared in the hallway, freezing to stare at them with stupor. A familiar silhouette popped up following them, sword in hand. Flavius. His eyes were wide when they landed on Hiccup before landing on Toothless. He opened his mouth but was interrupted by another roar. Flavius didn't need to tell Hiccup. He knew what was happening. A dragon was lurking in the imperial palace.

**\*\*XXX\*\***

\_On the eve of her marriage, Astrid hadn't closed her eyes of the

night. Whenever sleep and fatigue seemed to win over her nervousness, images rushed in her mind: Hiccup saying no, Hiccup flying away with Toothless, Hiccup fainting, Hiccup being eaten by a wild dragon that he had the idiocy to bring to Berk...\_

\_When in a dream, he had his right leg taken by a dragon who strangely looked like Snotlout, Astrid opened her eyes and pushed the covers in which she was fouled, to get out of her bed. She sighed and passed a hand in her messy hair, before approaching the window. The night was clear and fresh, a perfectly round moon reflected on a calm sea, everything seemed so quiet, while she was under the impression that a tornado swirled in her chest, she felt as if she was on the edge of a cliff and it was terrifying.\_

\_She loved Hiccup, more than her own life, more than anything or anyone, she knew that for a few years already. But a wedding... With the Chief of Berk moreover... She felt so small with this role, so insignificant and incapable. She, Astrid Hofferson, was afraid to fail. She always knew who she was and what she wanted, she never failed, she just rushed in every situation, without fear, without doubt... And Hiccup had happened in her life. She had always known him of course, he had always intrigued her, and she had hidden her curiosity behind a mask of indifference, convincing herself that she had to stay focused on her goal, becoming a shield maiden, a warrior and the most ferocious dragons slayer in Berk.\_

\_And Hiccup, the real Hiccup she had suspected behind his apparent awkwardness, had showed up. Self-assured, good and nice, ingenious, intelligent, courageous, more than she could ever be. And then she had begun to doubt. To be afraid. Afraid of being unable to be a wife worthy of the name, of not being able to give him children, do not assume tasks incumbent on her... Which was ridiculous, because she was always at his side, supporting him with success.\_

\_She walked to the bucket of water that stood on a table and refreshed her face, hoping to hunt her dark thoughts with cold water. She glared at her dress, lying on a chest, as if she was afraid that the fabric would come alive and chase her. She felt a strange mixture of joy and terror, anticipation and apprehension. She walked over to the chest and stroked the tip of her fingers on the sword she was going to give to Hiccup for the ceremony. It had been forged by Gobber, she had designed it, in the greatest of secrets, she was particularly fond of the handle, representing a familiar dragon which was probably sleeping next to Hiccup at the very moment.\_

\_She straightened and walked eagerly to the window. She grabbed a fur and passed it around her shoulders, above her night gown, before stepping over the edge and whistling.\_

"\_Stormfly, come on girl!"\_

\_The dragon lifted her sleepy eyes towards the young woman before hiding her head under a wing to go back to sleep.\_

"\_Stormfly! Come on, don't you want a night flight? We'll be back quickly!"\_

\_As Stormfly didn't respond, she changed her tactics.\_

"\_Stormfy, you wouldn't let me fall, would you?" she said, passing



her other leg over the edge, leaving her feet swinging in the space.\_

\_Seeing her rider in this position, Stormfly cried with panic before flying towards her. Astrid jumped and landed on her back with a victorious smile, she patted her dragon gently on her sides.\_

"\_Thank you Stormfly, I need some fresh air. You'll have a double ration of chicken I promise!"\_

\_They flew for long minutes aimlessly, drawing large circles above the island, enjoying the calm and the fresh and invigorating wind. Summer was ending, several weddings were planned before the first frost, but the chief and his bride would be the first to be celebrated. She could already see the traces of the preparations, the fest was going to last for days, it had already begun two days earlier, Astrid had to conform to the traditions and stay away. The next day would be her last as a girl, she would take the last bath, in the company of her mother, her aunts, Valka, before becoming a woman.\_

\_She feared this ceremony, she feared the moment where the kransen would be removed, she feared the advice which would undoubtedly give the women of the village, about the best way to live her wedding night. The single thought of it made her wish for the ground to open under her feet to swallow her. She breathed deeply and calmly. It was Hiccup she was going to marry, her Hiccup, who would be probably living the same torture and crude advices from the men. \_

\_They landed in the creek where everything began, where Hiccup did upend her world, for the best, where they would exchange their vows before the gods and every Berkian to love each other in this life and in Valhalla. \_

\_She got out of the back of Stormfly and looked around her.\_

\_She was going to marry Hiccup.\_

\_A smile stretched her lips while her heart began to beat faster and stronger. She was going to marry Hiccup!\_

"\_Astrid?"\_

\_She gave a jump with a cry and looked, wide-eyed, a familiar silhouette with a dragon head towards her. With a new cry, she leapt behind Stormfly.\_

"\_Hiccup, don't approach!"\_

"\_Astrid, is everything okay?"\_

"\_No! Yes! No! I mean yes, but we are not supposed to see each other before tomorrow!"\_

\_She could almost see him rolling his eyes.\_

"\_Fine, but what are you doing here?"\_

"\_I could ask you the same thing!" she replied, staying out of his

sight.\_

\_Hiccup cleared his throat with an obvious nervousness.\_

"\_I... er... I couldn't sleep..."\_

"\_Cold feet? Have you changed your mind about the wedding?"\_

\_She said that as if she was joking, but deep down inside, she always had this irrational fear, this uncertainty, as if she could only contemplate her life with disbelief.\_

"\_What? Never! I waited far too long for this day!"\_

\_She couldn't see him properly in the dark but she knew he was certainly at least as red as her.\_

"\_And... ER... Have you changed your mind?"\_

"\_Actually, yes, I'm seriously considering marrying Toothless! she replied.\_

\_Toothless, hearing his name, was next to her in a heartbeat, and looked at her with curiosity. She stroked him with a laugh, while Hiccup was pushing an indignant exclamation.\_

"\_Why is he allowed to see you?"\_

"\_Because you're the one I'm going to marry! Not him!"\_

\_Tomorrow. Marry. Her heart began to throb. She needed to breathe. Or to kiss him.\_

"\_I think I'm nervous..." she eventually confessed softly.\_

\_Hiccup let out a trembling laugh.\_

"\_I'm so nervous that when I wanted to get out, I tried to attach my prosthetic to my right leg..."\_

\_Astrid couldn't help laughing. The knot in her stomach seemed lighter.\_

"\_I know that I love you, but... I'm afraid of... I'm afraid to fail making you happy as you deserve..." he eventually admitted when their laughter vanished. \_

\_Astrid felt his heart melt. How did he know how to go through her heart with only a few words?\_

"\_Hiccup, she said gently, you make me happy, more than I could have hoped one day to be..."\_

\_She heard Hiccup sit on the grass, and she let herself sit on the ground, leaning against Stormfly, how purred when she absentmindedly stroked her sides.\_

"\_Hiccup?"\_

"\_Mmm?"\_

"\_Iâ€¦ I don't know how to cookâ€¦ Well, I tried, obviously, but it's badâ€¦ Really very bad, my mother tried to teach me but... I can't cook well..."\_

\_She seemed so embarrassed that Hiccup burst out laughing. Astrid groaned and crossed her arms even if he couldn't see her.\_

"\_Do you want my axe in your face?" she growled.\_

\_Hiccup shook his head and sighed with a smile.\_

"\_Astrid, I don't marry you for your kitchen skillsâ€¦ I'll do the cooking, I always did for my father and I! I don't mind!"\_

"\_But... I'm not really a real wife you know..."\_

"\_Tomorrow, you'll be one" he retorted in a dreamy tone.\_

"\_You know what I mean, I can't sew, I prefer training than cleaning, I... And if people made fun of you?"\_

"\_Oh yeah, that would be a first!" he said sarcastically.\_

"\_But it would be my fault, you're so respected, and now, people will laugh because you don't have a wife like any other, who doesn't know how to do all these things? A Chief's wife should know how to do everything! Can you see me as a mother if I can't even cook or sew?"\_

"\_My mum is a terrible cooker, Hiccup noticed, do you remember her attempt of stew? Astrid, I don't want a wife like the others, I want you, just the way you are, I want you so badly, my fierce, my beautiful, my stunning Valkyrieâ€¦!"\_

"\_Now you're cheesyâ€¦!" she said, unable to hide the waves in her voice. \_

"\_I love you, Astrid, I'm so proud to be loved by you, and our children will be more than proud to have you as a mother!"\_

\_She heard Hiccup stand up and froze when she heard his steps towards her.\_

"\_Hiccup, what are you doing, you shouldn't see me, we shouldn't even be talking!" She cried, her voice more acute than usual.\_

"\_I'm not going to see you, I... I justâ€¦ I'd like to hold your hand..."\_

\_He seemed so nervous, Astrid felt his presence across her dragon. She hesitated, then reached out her hand over the neck of Stormfly, who remained still. She felt his fingers scratched her own before they intertwined. She closed her eyes and sighed at the contact of his warm hand wrapped around hers. She missed him, she missed him so much. They hadn't seen each other for only a few days, but to know that he was so close, without being able to see him or to talk to him, had been the most frustrating experience ever.\_

\_Hiccup broke the silence.\_

"\_Tomorrow, you'll be my wife..." \_

"\_And you my husband..."\_

"\_I love you Astrid, and I want you to be happy, I want to take care of you, I want to protect you..."\_

\_Astrid groaned.\_

"\_You know that I don't need to be protected..."\_

"\_Astrid..."\_

\_His tone was suddenly serious.\_

"\_I know you could defeat an army of me in a heartbeat, I know you're agile, brilliant, I know you can protect yourself, but I love you, then... Let me try Astrid..."\_

Astrid didn't want to open her eyes. She wanted to relive this memory again and again, she wanted to feel the butterflies dancing in her stomach, the heat in her heart, she wanted to let the happiness stifle her. Opening her eyes would mean more suffering. The slightest grain of skin was painful, it was as if someone was branding her bruised back. She wanted to moan, to cry, but she had too many thoughts to deal with, she couldn't focus. She was thinking about Berk, her daughter, Hiccup, she thought about the predatory smile of the chief, about the empty gaze of Flavius, the cruel satisfaction of Nero. Every stroke of the whip had taken the air out of her lungs, each whip lash had hacked her soul, gradually, inexorably. She hadn't made any sound, but her tears had flowed on her cheeks, her back hurt so much that it seemed to be a giant wound, a gigantic bright burn.

She wanted to remain unconscious, to continue to bathe in a saving torpor, reliving Hiccup's face on their wedding day, how beautiful, how amazing he was in his ceremonial outfits, to see the emotion paint on his face, to see his lips tremor, his eyes shining with tears of joy, to see their alliances sparkle in the sun, high on the wrists of their swords, she wanted to see his face when he was looking at her rocking their daughter. As if he couldn't believe they were real. This exclusive look that he had only for them. She wanted to chase the pain out of her world.

She wanted Hiccup.

She opened an eye. Everything was so confusing. She moved and bit her tongue to not shout. She closed her eyes and breathed deeply. Biting her lower lip, she pushed on her arms and straightened in a sitting position. A muffled groan escaped her.

"Astrid!"

Kaleina immediately rushed toward her. Astrid concentrated on her breathing while looking around her. She was clearly in the cabin of a boat, which seemed strangely familiar to her. Shailaine approached in turn and Astrid felt even more confused. She wanted to talk, but her voice was hoarse again. Shailaine handed her a mug of water she drank

in a gulp. She cleared her throat and talked.

"What happened? Where are we? Where is Hiccup?"

While Shailaine was about to answer, the twins entered, accompanied by Saoirse.

"Astrid!"

Ruffnut rolled her arms around her neck, Astrid shuddered, wincing. Her friend immediately leapt backwards.

"You hurt her, stupid girl!" his brother exclaimed.

"I'm going to punch you if you call me stupid girl!"

"I'm not a stupid girl, I'm a stupid boy!"

Astrid was on the edge of tears. She felt like screaming with joy and holding her friends in her arms, which was not really "Astridian".

But she had missed them so much, and she had so many questions to ask.

"What happened?" she asked gently.

Her back hurt, it was hard to focus on something else.

"Hiccup came back with you in his arms and with your new friends", explained Fishlegs, entering.

"They speak a strange language but they look okay", added Tuffnut, shrugging.

"Where is Hiccup?"

He was supposed to be here.

Fishlegs and the twins exchanged a look. Astrid felt the eyes of Kaleina and Shailaine on her, but she had no time or energy trying to understand how they had arrived there, she was just happy to have them safe and sound.

"He said that he had given his word to a Roman and that he would join us once he would have kept his word... He left with Toothless and Snotlout..." Fishlegs explained with a sigh which clearly stated his disapproval.

"Master Flavius let him take you, he has a plan to stop his brother, and your husband is a part of the plan..." then said Shailaine, who had understood a part of the Exchange.

Astrid felt her blood freeze. Hiccup would try to counter Nero and Drago's plans, but he needed her, she knew Nero, she knew what he was capable of, Hiccup was going to get himself killed, he was going to try dialogue, he was going to believe that there could be some good even in Nero, and he would take reckless risks just trying to avoid hurting anyone...

She stood and staggered, her legs shaking under her weight.

"Wow, where you think you're going like that?" Fishlegs exclaimed.

"I... I have to find Hiccup, he... He needs me!"

Ruffnut and Tuffnut shook their head.

"No, he doesn't need you, without offense, he has Toothless! And you are injured..."

Astrid glared at them and grasped an axe.

"Astrid, he'll be fine, the twins are right, oh gods I can't believe I said that! Hiccup has Toothless and Snotlout..."

"Snotlout doesn't know Nero, I do! I have to go!" she cried, staggering to the door.

Shailaine and Fishlegs tried to stop her but she pushed them away, wincing, she was breathing fast and strong, she felt nauseous and she knew that she was very weakened, but nothing could convince her to stay. She would not lose Hiccup, no matter the price. She refused to lose him, she would protect him against Nero, against Drago, and against himself. Nothing was going to happen to him, she wouldn't allow that, she wouldn't allow that their daughter grows up without her father, that Berk loses its chief.

"Astrid, we have to get to the sea, and I promised Hiccup to keep you here! Fishlegs exclaimed, standing before her. He stared at the twins who didn't react.

"Don't ever stand between Astrid and her objective", Ruffnut recited, looking at her nails.

"Yeap, never ever!" Tuffnut added with a smirk.

"Astrid, I have to stop you!"

Astrid raised her eyebrows.

"I'd like to see you try!" she replied coldly.

As Fishlegs sighed with sadness, she softened and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Thank you, Fishlegs, for your loyalty, but I have to go, no matter what..."

"Let us come with you then!"

Astrid shook her head.

"Berk is in danger, you must get there as quickly as possible, they will need you..."

"Hiccup told us the same thing!" he said sadly.

He passed a hand on his face and stepped aside without a word. Astrid

rushed outside, unstable on her legs but determined. Everything was painful. Every step, every breath, every friction from the fabric of her clothes. The sea air whipped up her face as soon as she was on the deck, taking her almost by surprise. She saw that Johann and Octavius were talking at the back of the boat, they didn't see her going towards the exit. She ran down the pontoon that tied the boat to the deck, and turned with surprise when she heard footsteps behind her.

"Me come with you" said Kaleina crossing her arms.

There was something fierce and determined in her eyes, and it was new. Astrid doubted her motives, and then she nodded wordlessly. She didn't have much time left.

## 17. Chapter 17

**\*\*Hi you guys! \*\***

**\*\*It's 2am so I guess I'm just going to collapse in my bed! Thank you very much for reading this fiction despite my few mistakes (who said more than few?)\*\***

**\*\*Heli, Pt, lorde, Girlonfire44, thank you so much!\*\***

**\*\*Don't forget reviews, I love sharing my fiction, translation isn't easy, reviews would be appreciated!\*\***

**\*\*Take care!\*\***

**\*\*XXX\*\***

\_Hiccup was used to argue with his father. Before Toothless came in his life, his father used to shout at him, he used to sputter knowing his father wouldn't listen, and when the storm passed, the friendly indifference of his father handed over everything in its place. Since Toothless, on the other hand, disputes were less one sided but more animated, Hiccup felt more confident, and stood up to his father, who often ended up listening to him, and that made him undeniably confident. The exchanges were heated but bonds of mutual respect.

—

\_Except for today.\_

\_Today was about disappointment and fear.\_

\_Hiccup knew that his father would be furious, he had every reason to be, his one and only son roamed the skies, rushing head first into all kinds of situations all as epic as dangerous. That day, he had crossed a pirate ship. This was not the first time, generally, pirate ships didn't approach the archipelago, but Hiccup was flying so far away that it wasn't uncommon for him to see them. Except that he usually flew high enough in the clouds not to be seen, but that day, he had been neglecting. He had his first solo flight test, Astrid had accompanied him, because she often went with him and because he had to have a backup if the wings of his outfit didn't work as they were supposed to.\_

\_The flight was a success, and he had just climbed back on Toothless,

still exhilarated by this successful test and flushed by Astrid's shouts of pure joy and her eyes shining with admiration. They had flown less high than usual, and a rain of arrows had surprised them.\_

\_Everything happened so fast, so brutally that the scene kept playing and replaying before his eyes.\_

\_An arrow skimmed his arm, letting a bloody scratch, but he forgot the pain when he saw an arrow into the thigh of Astrid, who had pushed a howl of pain but was still clutching on Stormfly, who tossed and reeled trying to avoid the arrows.\_

"\_Astrid!" he shouted.\_

\_The young woman was livid but she had nodded to tell him she was fine, and they had escaped the pirates by climbing into the clouds before heading towards Berk. Hiccup had kept his eyes on the silhouette of Astrid, ready to intervene if she fell, he was shaking with anxiety, and anger. He saw blood on her leg and he felt sick. When they landed in the center of the village, the residents saw immediately that something was wrong, all pushed horrified exclamations when Astrid dropped from Stormfly's back. In a fraction of a second, Hiccup was holding her, an arm around her waist, while she looked at him gratefully.\_

"\_Astrid..."\_

"\_It's okay, I'm fine, it's nothing, I have known worseâ€¦!" she cut him with a small smile.\_

\_He didn't answer, he couldn't, no word could get out and none could describe how much he was angry with himself. When Gothi had invited him to leave the room, stating that the injury was not serious but that she had to heal it, Hiccup found himself alone in his anger.\_

"\_Hiccup!"\_

\_His father's voice was a great barometer of his mood. However, his voice indicated that he was furious. Hiccup had turned to him, tight jaw, his look hard.\_

\_Stoick had frowned and then his gaze landed with concern on the injured arm of his son.\_

"\_You have to take care of thisâ€¦!" he said in a gruff tone.\_

\_Hiccup didn't react.\_

"\_By all the Gods, Hiccup how can you be so irresponsible! You are my heir, you're the future chief of Berk, and you have a duty, responsibilities! You could have been killed!"\_

"\_Do you think I wanted that?" he had responded, clutching his fists. His own anger against himself and the concern for Astrid devoured him from the inside, there was no need for an additional reprimand. Toothless left discreetly accompanied by Stormfly.\_



"\_If you keep flying too far from here, you'll eventually attract enemies on Berk and we don't need that! You have to think about all the Berkians, and besides, why would you need to explore!"\_

\_Hiccup rolled his eyes.\_

"\_Really, dad? I thought that you had got over why I do what I do?"\_

"\_You're not all alone in that Hiccup! You have to think about how I would feel if... Have you thought about Astrid? You're going to get her killed one day!"\_

\_It was too much. He felt as if he had been punched in his belly, he felt pain, suffocation, while his father's words echoed in his ears.\_

\_It was his fault. She was injured by his fault.\_

\_And she might die one day because of him. Without a word, he had turned on his heels and went back inside Gothi's house. He heard her in the main room, he heard Astrid hissing with pain, and he felt bile rise in his throat. He didn't lift the curtain, he wasn't ready to see her.\_

\_He went behind the house, to sit in the small garden Gothi had, in which the rare medicinal herbs that survived the harsh climate of the island were growing. He had contemplated the ocean that stretched before him. When he was about five, he used to take refuge sometimes at Gothi's, when Gobber was absent. He had always liked the view he had from her house, he felt as if he was flying when he stood on the tip of his toes, at the end of the garden, just above the ocean.

\_

\_He would never have thought that one day, he would fly...\_

\_He sighed. There were many things that he hadn't imagined. Good and bad things. He didn't know much about who he really was, who he was supposed to become, but this quest, these adventures, new Islands, new dragons, he lived all of this viscerally, like a vital need to feed his curiosity and his imagination, maybe to fill these shadows about who he was.\_

\_But losing Astrid... Nothing was worth it. Nothing was worth such a risk.\_

\_Gothi had found him there, lost in his thoughts. She had showed the inside, urging him to go back. He hesitated, but his body seemed to have decided to join Astrid by itself. She was sitting on the edge of the bed and she was about to get up.\_

"\_Astrid! Let me help you!" \_

\_She had rolled her eyes and had brandished a long stick with an incurved extremity.\_

"\_Hiccup, it's just a scratch, Gothi gave it to me so that I can walk!"\_

"\_You should lie, you have lost blood, you should

rest..."\_

"\_Hiccup, come on! You had barely opened an eye that you were out parading all cock-a-hoop, and you had lost a foot!" she retorted.\_

\_She stood, winced slightly before offering a smile to her fiancÃ©.\_

"\_See? I'm fine!"\_

\_Except that he didn't see. Not really. He avoided her gaze, he couldn't look at her in the eyes, it was as if her eyes burned him.\_

"\_Hiccup, what's wrong? I swear that if you dare to blame yourself, I'll..."\_

"\_You shouldn't come with me anymoreâ€¦!"\_

\_Astrid, her mouth agape, glared at him in silence until he finally looked up.\_

\_She looked hurt. He saw her face become tight, her teeth grinding, her eyes narrowing, and it took her two steps to shove him against the nearest wall, her stand jammed under his chin.\_

"\_Are you saying that I slow you down?" She hissed, glaring at him.\_

\_Hiccup, wide eyes, stammered:\_

"\_What? No! Of course no! I didn't mean it like that!"\_

"\_So what do you mean, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the third?"\_

\_He wanted to push the stand which was beginning to strangle him but Astrid's grip was too strong.\_

"\_I can't speak with that on my throat" he managed to say.\_

\_Astrid straightened, removing the stand, using it to stabilize her and to stand straight, always glaring at him. Hiccup closed his eyes and sighed.\_

"\_What I mean is that I can't ask you to come with me, I can't risk your life, I don't want to risk your life, I'll never forgive myself if something happens to you..."\_

\_Astrid rolled her eyes.\_

"\_Hiccup, are we going to have this discussion every time something happens? Because life as Vikings isn't an easy one, in case you have not noticed it, and you'll have to stop feeling guilty about everything that goes wrong..."\_

\_As he didn't react, still tortured and desperate, she approached him.\_

"\_Hiccup, we're in this together, we live together or we die

together..."\_

\_Hiccup shook his head. She took his face between her hands, and the stand fell to the ground in a noise that startled them both.\_

"\_Look at me! Hiccup, we live together or we die together... And anyway, you would be bored without me at Valhalla..."\_

"Can you see something?"

Snotlout's voice seemed distant, he was whispering nervously, and Hiccup did his best to control his own apprehension. Drago had a gigantic dragon under his yoke, and he didn't know what other unknown and trained to kill dragons he was hiding. The Palace was deserted, a burning smell wafted into the air.

"We saw the beast, it's wandering in kitchens" whispered Flavius. He seemed more pale as ever, his always wide-eyed arose regularly on Toothless, and Hiccup could swear that he had faded more each time he was looking at the dragon.

"The Emperor?" he asked.

"Under protection at the other side of Rome..." Flavius answered, tightening his grip on his sword.

They progressed as silently as possible through the corridors immersed in the dark, following the roars that reverberated from time to time. They were increasingly close, and nervousness earned the ranks.

"What does he look like?" Hiccup asked.

Flavius shot him a quick glance.

"I've never seen anything comparable... It's probably ten times my horse, he moves very fast, he... He has a tail bristling with thorns... His skin has the same color as the depths of the ocean... Several men died in the West Wing... You've already seen it?"

Hiccup shook his head, frowning. Snotlout and he exchanged a look. Of course, he knew that they didn't know all the dragons, but still... Toothless suddenly sniffed in the air and a menacing growl rose from his throat.

"What's wrong, bud, did you smell something?" he whispered.

Toothless growled even more, and Hiccup turned slowly, peering into the darkness that engulfed the corridor before them. Everybody froze, their weapons ready. The only sound came from their choppy breaths, and this quiet was suddenly almost more frightening than the roars pushed so far by the dragon. Hiccup could hear his own heart beating hard and fast, he felt the tension emanating from his companions, he saw the soldiers glancing at Toothless, with fear, their hands starting nervously on their swords to every gesture of the dragon, he saw Flavius trying to regain control on the situation in fighting against himself, and he saw Snotlout, who would probably curse him for putting him in such a situation. Even if technically, it was his choice.

"Is this thing reliable?" Flavius asked softly when nothing happened after a few minutes.

Hiccup frowned. He didn't really know what to think about Flavius. He wasn't a fool, he had seen the look that had the Roman towards Astrid before leaving the dorm, after having exposed his plan. Confusion in his eyes, a look that betrayed a desire, a need, which were so familiar to him. He recognized these signs for experiencing them for years, he was used to feel this need, this desire, as if there wasn't anything else anymore, as if she was everything, and the gods knew how she was to him, she was his soul. He had seen lust in so many eyes, on so many men over official visits on the neighboring islands, during which she had come with him. He had thought to ask her not to come anymore, to no longer feel that anger and that urge to beat them as soon as another man stared at her with obvious desire, but he knew Astrid better than that.

No doubt she would have put her axe on his throat, asking him if he didn't trust her. The only time he had made this mistake, he was seventeen years old. He had learnt the lesson then. And he trusted her, with his life. He had understood that Flavius wanted Astrid. He didn't hate him, he could barely blame him for feeling the way he felt when himself couldn't help but be in love with her for years and forever. And after all, Flavius had let him take Astrid without trying to keep her for himself.

"This 'thing' is my best friend, the most loyal you could ask for" he replied.

"Nothing is hapâ€¦"

Flavius didn't finish his sentence. Everything happened in a fraction of second. A minute, darkness surrounded them, the next minute, explosions echoed around them, illuminating the Palace. Marble debris fell from the ceiling, engulfing them in a cloud of white dust, while the ground was shaking under their feet.

The soldiers began to shout, flattening themselves on the walls, Hiccup was pulled back by Toothless just in time as a gigantic column collapsed at his feet. He picked himself up, groggy, covered with dust. They couldn't see where the shots came from, they could hear the impacts that reverberated endlessly in the Palace, arising from darkness and at a hellish pace.

"Hiccup, if you have an idea, it's time!" Snotlout shouted, keeping his eyes rose toward the ceiling as if he feared that it could collapse.

Hiccup, who was paralysed after nearly getting crushed, reacted immediately.

"Toothless, we have to find this dragon, we have to go after him!"

Toothless groaned with disapproval, glaring at him with a look that very clearly indicated that running away was the best option according to him.

"Toothless, here we go bud!" Hiccup cried, darting forward, his arms

above his head.

Toothless didn't have any other choice than following his rider. He roared and caught up, Hiccup climbed on his back and they continued to move forward, dodging each shot that would explode in the hallway behind them.

While a powerful explosion dug a crater in one of the walls, the light was such intense that he finally saw the dragon. Lurking in the shadows, black eyes like coal, his dark blue skin shining. The tail was risen, and Hiccup barely had time to flatten against Toothless and he shouted:

"Watch out! Shields!"

The soldiers, who did not understand the northern language, had nevertheless the presence of mind to imitate their leader and Snotlout, who waved their shields before them, in which came to plant several formidable spines. Under the power of the shock, all took few steps back, but they were fortunately unharmed.

"Go, bud! We're going to see what could calm our new friend!"

Toothless didn't hesitate this time, he flew, he and Hiccup maneuvering to avoid every shot. Snotlout noticed what they were trying to do.

"We have to gain his attention!" he shouted.

Seeing that only Flavius understood, he grunted with frustration and began hitting his shield with his sword, immediately imitated by Flavius then by the soldiers. The noise was deafening, but had the desired effect. The attention of the dragon was reported on the small group of men and Hiccup took the opportunity to land behind him. He jumped to the ground and took a deep breath.

"Hey, buddy!"

The dragon turned his head, before turning completely, slowly, to face Toothless and Hiccup. He was breathing hard, each exhalation smelled sulfur, his nostrils twitching, his scaly skin seemed like covered with sweat. Hiccup handed one arm, while Toothless grumbled, with a clear warning towards the other dragon.

"It's fine, buddy, said gently Hiccup, before approaching the dragon. You have nothing to fear from me, I don't want to hurt you, it's alright..."

He approached slowly, the clatter of the shields had ceased, the time seemed suspended, every second stretching into an eternity, and everyone held their breath. Hiccup handed a hesitant arm. He scanned the eyes of the dragon and frowned.

Something was wrong.

He had something that sounded wrong in his eyes. Suddenly he realized what it was. The dragon had no pupils. His eyes were two huge globes of darkness, in which he could distinguish nothing, neither emotions nor soul. However, it was the eyes of Toothless who had changed

everything. It was his eyes, full of fear and insecurity, which had struck Hiccup in the heart. It was his eyes that had created the first link between them. But in those eyes, nothing. Just darkness, just unfathomable darkness.

"This is not normalâ€¦" he muttered.

He felt the hot breath of the dragon on his fingers and swallowed. The dragon suddenly slammed his jaws and Hiccup barely had time to remove his hand. The dragon roared, a cry so powerful that Hiccup couldn't help but stick his hands over his ears. He felt that his head was going to explode, he knew that he should move, get away, but he was like paralyzed, trying desperately to block the thundering cry of the dragon. It was so powerful that he felt his eardrums vibrate dangerously.

Toothless rushed to stand before him, roaring and spitting with fury. When the roar of the dragon ceased, Hiccup's ears were buzzing, all the sounds seemed muffled, distant, confused, and he had the impression that the corridor whirled around him. The others, who haven't been directly exposed, seemed less affected, but slightly dizzy. Hiccup tried to climb on the back of Toothless, but a paw knocked them, sending them flying against the wall at the other end of the corridor. Toothless got up and turned with concern to Hiccup, who had to rely on the wall to straighten his legs. He was sure to have a few broken ribs at least, and with each breath, pain shoot through his ribcage. But he had to move, and fast.

The dragon charged but Toothless began to shoot on sight on him. If he slowed down, he kept rushing on Hiccup. The young man groped his leg and discovered with horror that his sword was no longer in its place. His gaze frantically scanned his surroundings, and he saw it, in the middle of dusts, a several steps away from him. It had probably flown there when he had been thrown against the wall, and he would never have the time to reach it. Toothless kept firing, injuring the dragon and redoubling his anger. He wanted to reach his rider but the beast sent him violently against a wall that collapsed on him.

"Toothless!" Hiccup cried, horrified.

It was as if a steel hand had seized his inside without any mercy. He could barely see the dark and inert silhouette under the rubble, he couldn't see if his friend was still breathing and a wave of panic threatened to submerge him.

Not a single moment he had imagined or seen a life without Toothless. Not a single moment.

He saw that Snotlout and the others were struggling against the spiky tail which swept the air, preventing them to intervene. The dragon opened his jaws, Hiccup felt his hot and foul breath but he threw himself to the ground and rolled up to be out of reach. The dragon reacted with a disconcerting speed, following the path of Hiccup. He had never seen a dragon, save Toothless, moving with such flexibility, he was almost as fast as Toothless while having the weight of two Monstruous Nightmares. Hiccup felt adrenelines pulsing in his veins, his ears were still buzzing, but yet when a shout caught the eye of the dragon, he immediately recognized the voice and his heart made a jump in his chest. He began to gasp.

"Hey, yak head, over here!" Astrid grabbed a piece of debris and threw it with all her might against the dragon. She was pale as a cloth, her forehead was covered with sweat, but her look was as the one she used to have whenever a battle was looming.

Concentrated, determined, fierce.

She was not alone, Kaleina was right behind her, looking slightly terrified.

"Astrid! Hiccup shouted, while his blood froze, Get out of here!"

The young woman ignored him, while the dragon seemed to hesitate between Hiccup and the two young women. He seemed to decide that two were worth better than one and turned to spit a stream of flames to Astrid and Kaleina, who took shelter behind a marble column.

Hiccup took advantage of the inattention of the dragon to run grab his sword, he rushed to the beast, slipped on the floor between the legs of the dragon, releasing gas from Zippleback up to arise before arising and facing the dragon, interposing him between Astrid andâ€¦ this.

The dragon froze, surprised. Hiccup didn't hesitate, he pressed the button, and know about snapping the spark that detonated the gas, sending the dragon on the ground a few meters. Hiccup rushed to Astrid, who came out from behind the column to find themselves engulfed in a hug that made her wince and cry.

"Astrid, you're hurt, you have toâ€¦"

"I don't have to anything! I am there, make do with it! There's no me without you!" she cut him sharply.

His protests died in her throat. Instead, he grabbed her hair and kissed her. The dragon was already about to attack.

"Hiccup, what do we do? Snotlout screamed.

"We stand!" he shouted back, brandishing his sword. Astrid, her axe in her hand, peaked near him, while Flavius discovered her presence. He paled and responded weakly to her smile. Hiccup hadn't time to bother with it. Toothless was buried under debris of a wall and a gigantic and fearsome dragon loaded them in a corridor in which it's hard to move.

He could almost hear the voice of Fishlegs. Dragon force 7. Chance of survival: 0.

## 18. Chapter 18

\*\*Hi guys! I wanted to update tonight (tonight in France), but my girls are sick so I'm home with them, and here is the new chapter, while they are napping (and to be honest, I'm almost napping right now).\*\*

\*\*I hope you'll enjoy this chapter, I have to say that the

translation was very hard this time, but hey, I survived this!\*\*

\*\*I don't know when will be the next chapter, soon I hope, but I'm leaving for holidays at the end of the week, and then, I'll be working on my daughter's birthday, she's turning 6 and she wants a HTTYD party! Isn't she wonderful! \*\*

\*\*Back to the fiction: some people asked me why Toothless couldn't just control him, as the Alpha. Well, I think Toothless is just like Hiccup, he wouldn't just take control, he would always try to find another way. Besides, remember, this dragon's eyes are completely black, you'll understand later why and that's will explain why even if Toothless had tried to control him, he would have failed.\*\*

\*\*Astrablack1248: thank you very much, I was laughing with the ending, I pictured Fishlegs saying that!\*\*

\*\*Girllonfire44: haha happy you liked it! Thank you!\*\*

\*\*Dot: thank you so much! Your review made my day! Chapter six is also one of my favorite! \*\*

\*\*Felix: Vikings are stubborn, they could stand up to death itself! Thank you very much!\*\*

\*\*Fault: haha, yeah, he'll probably have to have a talk with him, but they are far too busy now! Thank you for reading and reviewing!\*\*

\*\*Jo: I love flashbacks, I'm always trying to plan them according to the chapters, glad you like them! Thank you!\*\*

\*\*Pt: haha, I'll have to give this dragon a name, right? Thank you for your review!\*\*

\*\*Lorde: thank you very much! Glad you're still reading!\*\*

\*\*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing, it means a lot to me!\*\*

\*\*Enjoy, and don't forget the reviews!\*\*

\*\*Take care!\*\*

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"What do we do now?" Snotlout asked.

"We try to survive until I have an idea!"

"Deal!" replied Astrid.

She knew that Hiccup didn't want to injure or to kill the dragon, as hostile and out of control he was. Hiccup was a man of peace, he avoided violence, and he hated above all the idea of harming in any way a living being. With a roar, the dragon charged the group, which dispersed by rolling on the ground or leaping to avoid the furious clutches of the beast. Toothless began to shot tirelessly, he growled furiously, trying to intervene, standing up to the gigantic



dragon.

"We should attack him in the air" Astrid screamed, trying to be heard in the chaos that surrounded them.

Kaleina and Snotlout looked like they were almost dancing, avoiding both the debris which continued to fall from the ceiling and be thrown in the air, and the deadly attacks of the dragon. The soldiers, terrified, somehow avoided the pitiless jaw and blind paw blows of the dragon, while trying, in vain, to injure him with their weapons. Flavius was quiet, he seemed to have given up directing operations and relying entirely on Hiccup. His face twisted when he saw Astrid climb behind Hiccup on the back of Toothless. She put her arms around his waist, and he saw him briefly put his hand on hers in a tender gesture. Toothless, once the riders installed, spurred in the air with a characteristic noise that sounded between the walls, and continued to shoot on sight, slaloming as much as possible in the corridor, which threatened to collapse at any time.

In the tough fight, if soldiers and Snotlout's weapons had little impact on the beast, the firing of Toothless began to be effective on the thick armor of the dragon, who began to gasp while a umpteenth shot injured him. He seemed to slow down, he relied more on one leg than on the other, and for a moment, they thought they had defeated him. But suddenly, while Hiccup was holding Toothless and considered the idea of leaving him alone, the dragon flew into a rage. He began to roar again and suddenly, he swept an annex wall that collapsed, missing Toothless and his riders. Toothless managed to escape in a spin, but Hiccup felt with horror Astrid's arms getting loose and spitting off from around his waist.

"Astrid!" he shouted immediately trying to catch her, but it was too late. With a scream, Astrid fell and landed heavily on the back of the dragon, who began to kick. The young woman, wide-eyed, tried to grasp somehow on him. She slipped on the scaly skin and she hold on, her hands were bleeding but she managed to hang on. She frowned and dropped a hand to catch her axe into her belt, but the ups and downs were too violent and he finally sent her violently to the ground.

"Astrid!" screamed both Hiccup and Flavius.

Toothless was trying to pass the dragon but a wall of flames from the beast prevented them from reaching Astrid.

Astrid was disoriented by the violence of the shock, which took the breath away from her. The contact of her cheek with the cold marble and rubble made her blink several times. She raised her head, her cheek bruised, and saw with horror that the dragon was ready to crush her with his paw. She could hear Hiccup screaming desperately, trying to reach her, but was slowed down by the huge dragon that obstructed the corridor, while Toothless kept shooting. Astrid groped on the ground and caught her axe. If she was going to die, it would be with an axe in her hand and fighting. She felt groggy, her ears were buzzing, and her back was so painful that she hardly dared to breathe. She felt the metallic taste of blood in her mouth, but she refused to give up. She wanted to get up but she had no time, the paw with sharpened claws swooped down on her.

She couldn't close her eyes, she was like mesmerized by her own

death, her hands tight on the handle of her axe. She heard Hiccup, Flavius and Snotlout screaming her name. It was then that she felt herself suddenly thrust back, and that a silhouette appeared before her, being thrown in the air with unprecedented violence.

"Kaleina!" Astrid cried when she recognized who had just saved her life.

She wanted to rush to her friend, but several explosions resounded, she froze, ready to fight, when she saw Hookfang, Meatlug, Barf and Belch arise in the air, without their riders. The soldiers seemed terrified, she heard Snotlout shouting with joy, and Hiccup's voice preventing the soldiers from attacking.

"They are friends, don't hurt them, they are friends!"

The dragons came to move immediately alongside Toothless, and joined their shots, under the stunned looks of Flavius and his men. Astrid began to look for Kaleina. Flavius rushed towards her. He was disheveled, his cloak was torn, he had dried blood on his super ciliary arch, but he was unhurt.

"Astrid, are you hurt?" he asked, catching her arm.

The young woman couldn't answer. Her gaze frantically scanned the corridor, still in the grip of the anger of the dragon. Hiccup flew on Toothless again, and when he saw her, he frowned, seeing Flavius holding her arm, but relief rushed on his face.

"Thanks Thor, you're alive!" he exclaimed.

He didn't have time to run to her, he had to keep fighting, Snotlout was already on Hookfang who inflamed with a powerful roar. Astrid felt her heart stop when she recognized an inert silhouette, slightly obscured by a pile of rubble.

"No!"

She pulled away from the grasp of Flavius and began to run. She heard the Roman order his men to attack the dragon. Then she couldn't hear anything. Nor the roars of the dragon caught between the air and the ground. Nor the cries of triumph of Snotlout. Nor the familiar sound of a Night Fury in mid-flight to attack.

It was as if all her senses weren't working, except her view.

Kaleina was on the ground, disarticulated, blood escaping from her nose and her mouth. Astrid dropped to her knees next to her friend. A huge weight suddenly weighed on her shoulders and at the heart of her chest.

"Kaleina..."

"Astrid..." she whispered, turning eyes toward her. Her voice was barely audible, and her lips were already gray. Astrid felt tears flowing from her eyes without being able to stop them. Kaleina was covered with wounds, but the worst was by far on her abdomen, whereby blood escaped. Astrid laid her hands on it, hoping to stem the bleeding, but deep down inside, she knew it was useless.

Â« You don't cry... Â» Kaleina breathed.

"Youâ€|Why did you have to save me! Oh... Oh Kaleina, I am... I'm so sorry..." Astrid sobbed, closing her eyes.

"You live... You loved... Him need you, him lifeless if you dead..."

Astrid could only shake her head, sobbing, with Kaleina's blood flooding between her fingers. She knew that Hiccup needed her, but she couldn't accept the idea that her friend sacrificed her life for her.

"Youâ€| You have to hold on... You have to stay alive... Kaleina, think about the man you love..."

She was begging even if she could feel life escaping her friend.

"Me dead for a long time..."

Astrid felt her heart break. She understood that she was talking about that terrible night, when Nero had abused her. She suffered for her friend, she felt so helpless, so vain. She had her heart broken and she felt such hatred against the Roman that she felt her body become painfully tight. Kaleina had a spasm and coughed, spitting blood.

"Kaleina, forgive me, forgive me..."

Kaleina did not respond.

Her eyes closed slowly, her body eased and Astrid knew that she wasn't suffering anymore.

She took her hands trembling and covered with blood from the belly of Kaleina, she stroked her forehead, leaving a trail of blood, and a new wave of tears overwhelmed her. She knew that her friends needed her, the fight wasn't over, but her body seemed paralyzed by grief.

"Astrid! Astrid, oh Odin, are you hurt? What's..."

He was suddenly silent, understanding that this blood was not hers. She felt his arms grabbing her and helping her on her feet, when her eyes crossed Hiccup's green eyes, she suddenly realized where she was. The look they exchanged lasted only a fraction of a second, but so much was said in this gaze. Grief, anger, unconditional love, fear, determination.

Astrid had the impression that a burst of oxygen had forced into her lungs, sadness suddenly gave way to anger. She wiped her hands on her clothes and without a word, climbed behind Hiccup on Toothless. She realized that the corridor was deserted, half collapsed, surviving soldiers took care of the wounded, Flavius was eying Snotlout and Hookfang while the other dragons were flying at full speed in the direction of an outdoor courtyard. How did she not notice what was happening, how did she not notice the sudden calm, so confusing now that she felt dizzy.

"Where... Where is the dragon?"

Her voice seemed so unfamiliar, almost foreign, and she didn't like that feeling. As if her body was just an envelope made of grief and bitterness. While her soul seethed with so many different emotions.

"He flew away, we have to stop him!"

Astrid nodded and clung to him. She closed her eyes for a second, breathing his smell of burnt, of sweat, and his very essence. She wanted to melt into him, she wanted to forget everything in his arms, and she wanted him so badly. He was her escape when everything was collapsing around her, she had missed him so much.

"Hiccup, I..."

"We'll give her a Viking burial, the burial of a warrior..." he said gently, placing a hand on her own.

Astrid swallowed, moved.

"I love you..." she whispered.

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They had waited to be off. To have left the sea for the ocean. Thanks to dragons, less than a day was necessary. Hiccup had then left on the back of Toothless to come an hour after towing a boat that looked like by far to a Viking ship, smaller and without the frills. He wouldn't tell them where he had found it, but Toothless seemed almost satisfied with himself. A sheet covered Kaleina, Astrid had put her axe into her hands crossed on her chest, and Johann had consented to provide them with jewelry and dishes for her voyage to Valhalla. Astrid didn't know what her friend's beliefs were, but she hoped that her trip to the afterlife would be peaceful and that she would find the rest she deserved.

Then they had let the boat float away, until Toothless fired it.

Shailaine was crying quietly, clutching her daughter against her, the twins didn't know Kaleina, but they respected the grief of their friend. Fishlegs and Snotlout were standing with them, away.

When Hiccup landed back on board, he came to stand next to Astrid, they looked at the flaming boat until he disappeared on the horizon.

Her face lashed by the salt-laden wind, Astrid waited until her tears were dry to turn to face Hiccup, who took this gesture as the signal he was waiting for. He immediately took her in his arms, barely masking the relief he felt by holding her against him, warm and alive. He knew that the situation was dramatic and that nothing was gained, but he wanted to focus on the present moment.

The dragon had escaped them, once outside, he had flown away, quickly disappearing into the darkness. Hiccup had no time to pursue him, he was no longer his priority, and they had to go back to Berk as soon as possible. Flavius had promised to join them with men and weapons,

Nero was nowhere to be found, and Hiccup knew that Flavius hoped to find his brother in Berk.

He gently stroked her hair, careful not to touch her back, and he closed his eyes of contentment when she nestled her head in the hollow of his neck and he felt her hot breath against his skin.

"You came for me..." she said softly.

He didn't answer. The answer was so obvious.

"You could have stayed in Berk, she continued, you should have, it was your duty..."

He tugged his arms around her.

"I can't be Chief without you in my life..." he said.

Astrid felt so loved that she felt tears burning her eyes. She needed this. This amazing love, this amazing man. She needed him. More than oxygen, more than anything else.

"Have you an idea how to name our daughter?" she whispered.

Hiccup step away slightly to look at her. He drank every detail of her face with such tenderness in his eyes, and then he smiled sadly.

"I think we could give her the name of a warrior..."

Astrid nodded, she couldn't speak, too many emotions jostled into her, she was both impatient and terrified at the idea of coming back to Berk, it seemed an eternity had passed since her kidnapping, she knew that her daughter, her tiny baby, would have forgotten her, and it made her sick. She wanted to scream and to cry at this very idea. But she also knew that the fight wasn't over yet, and she was terrified at the idea of having her daughter back to maybe die on the battlefield.

"What do you think about Kaleina..."

She stared at him with surprise, and then her eyes filled with tears, and she sank again against him.

"It would be perfect..." she whispered against his chest.

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**\*\*Here we go, cap on Berk! \*\***

## 19. Chapter 19

**\*\*Hey people!\*\***

**\*\*I know, I'm late, sorry for that, just put that axe downâ€¦\*\***

**\*\*I wasn't at home for a while and then, I had so many ideas for the fiction that I had to write them, in french. I'm also planning the**

HTTYD party for my daughter. Life has been very busy, but here I am! The new chapter, a lot of Hiccstrid inside! \*\*

\*\*Thank you to everyone who reviewed, so much! I have to go to bed, but read and review!\*\*

\*\*I also wanted to ask you to introduce yourself, you don't have to, but it would be funny to know you better, just don't put your real name or your phone number.\*\*

\*\*Read and don't forget, reviews! Et remember, English isn't my first language!\*\*

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Slowly, Hiccup spin-dried the cloth, and passed it gently on Astrid's hands, before going back up along her arms. He dived the cloth in the water, which had a reddish tinge, he spin-dried it again, and set himself to pass it on her shoulders and her neck. Astrid was silent and passive, gazing in the vagueness. Hiccup was cleaning the traces of blood and grime that covered her, if only the cloth could clean her soul from the horrific memories that would haunt her for the rest of her life.

The first time that Hiccup had seen Astrid undressed, it was without her knowing. They were eighteen, they have planned to meet for a morning flight to a new island that they had discovered the day before. He had wanted to surprise her, but when Toothless had raised him up to the window of her room, he had struggled to remove his eyes from her. Astrid had her back to him, and had taken off her nightgown to dress, she was wearing some leggings, but her back was completely bare.

He had been like mesmerized, fascinated by the way the rays of the rising sun danced in her blond hair half down, illuminating the pale lines that marked her back. He remembered having promised to himself that one day, he would kiss each of these scars, because they were part of Astrid, they were a part of her, and they were part of what had built her to the wonderful woman she was. He vowed that he would know one day the history of each of these scars.

Then, during their wedding night, he had traced each scar from the tip of his fingers, before kissing feverishly every grain of skin prior to venerate and honor her with all the love he felt for her.

Today, his throat was tightening when he was looking at her bruised back. Dimly lit by the flickering flame of a candle, her back was striped with marks red and raw. He stretched out his hand but didn't dare to touch her. He closed his eyes, pleased that she couldn't see his face. He couldn't hide how upset he was, his distress was certainly easy to read on his features.

"Hiccup? Is everything ok?" Astrid asked gently.

Hiccup reopened eyes and seized the pot containing the ointment that would help the healing process.

"I... It's going to hurt..."

He cursed his hesitation and the waves in his voice. \_It's going to hurt\_? Seriously? As if she wasn't already hurting

"Hiccup, it's fine..."

He dipped his fingers in the thick pomade, and shivered when he put them on the still oozing wounds. Astrid shuddered and groaned, closing her eyes and lowering her head.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry..." he muttered, massaging gently, and biting nervously his lips.

"Hiccup, it's not your fault..." she whispered.

Her breathing had quickened, she swallowed, her hands, resting on her knees, were squeezed so hard that her knuckles were white. He didn't answer. His throat was too much tight to talk, he had the feeling that if he opened his mouth, he would lost control over his grief. He wasn't the one holding the whip, but he could have done something, he should have done something, instead of letting himself dragged by Octavius. He had turned back and he had left, while a monster was whipping the woman he loved! What was wrong with him? First his father, then Astrid...

Why was he never there when he was needed? His dark thoughts were echoing the words of Astrid, a few years ago, when he was only the walking shame of Berk. She was right, he was never where he was supposed to be...

"Hiccup, you couldn't do anything..."

She knew him too well. As he didn't answer, she turned carefully to face him, he suspended his hand, his fingers covered with ointment in the air, and stared at her.

Illumined by the candle, she was even more beautiful, even more unreal, than usual, he was breathless. Her eyes seemed darker than the ocean, which contrasted with the usual ice blue, locks were surrounding her face, untamed, and her hair was falling like a golden cascade, on her chest, hiding her breasts, he was amazed, but then, he saw the dark circles under her eyes, he saw the pallor of her cheeks, usually less hollow.

Her emaciated face bore traces of the suffering that she had experienced in the recent weeks, away from her island, away from her family. And it was breaking his heart. He rested his hand full of pomade and raised the other to caress her cheek. She nestled her face against his palm, and gave him a small smile.

"Astrid..."

He didn't really know how to express how he felt. The words were rarely lacking to him, but at this moment, he felt both empty and too full at the same time. As if words were not enough, but his emotions were asking to be expressed. He felt as worried and vulnerable as the clumsy teenager he used to be. As soon as Astrid was concerned, he was helpless...

"Nothing of what you might say or do will change the past, you are not responsible, and if you have done anything, we would probably be

both dead right now. Hiccup, you came for me, you saved me, and that's all what matters..."

Hiccup exhaled a shaking breath, he examined her face with an almost scary greed.

"I love you, I love you so much, I... I can't even tell how much I do, if something happens to you, I... I... Oh Gods!"

He shook his head, wiped his hands and grabbed the bandages, his eyes avoiding hers. Astrid knew he was upset, and he tried to do well despite everything, anything she would say could make his pain more unbearable. Then she turned again to let him wrap the bandage around her torso. When he had finished, she grabbed the front of his shirt, and tenderly kissed him on the cheek.

"Thank you!"

Thoughtfully, he looked at her getting dressed, she refused to be helped, arguing that she was no longer a child. She flinched when she put her shirt back, but glared at him, daring him to try anything. She was so determined, so fierce, so prompt to throw herself, heart and soul, in the battle...

"I want you to stay away from Berk for now!"

She froze, her hands on the belt of her skirt. She glared at him with wide eyes.

"Excuse me? What do you mean?" she asked with astonishment.

He stepped towards her and took her hands in his to look at her straight in the eyes.

"I love you Astrid, more than my own life, if ever you... If you don't make it, I'll die with you, I would follow you, Odin and great Thor, I'll follow you! Astrid, you are everything to me, and you are injured, and you have already been through so much, then I'm begging you, stay here..."

She pulled away her hands, crossed her arms over her chest, and made a step backwards to look at him. She looked more dismayed than angry.

"Hiccup, how many times are we going to have this conversation throughout our lives? You already tried to leave me behind, and it never worked! I'm not a princess in distress, I want to fight Drago and Nero, I want to show them that no one buy or sell Astrid Hofferson with impunity..."

There was something new in her voice, it was hard, brittle. She saw in it the occasion for a personal revenge, and this reinforced Hiccup in his decision. She could be so fierce when she had a purpose that she forgot her own safety, and he would never allow that.

"You're also a Haddock..." Hiccup corrected, without even thinking.

"And I'm going to fight side by side with you!"



"Astrid, I'm begging you, you have to think about our daughter and about me, I don't..."

"Don't you dare make me feel guilty about our daughter!" she roared furiously, uncrossing her arms to step towards him. "Do not use our daughter to achieve your ends!"

He rolled his eyes, earning him a kick in the stomach. Once he had regained his breath, he stepped back.

"I need you alive, to manage the village if I... I... For..."

"I'm the best warrior you have, you need me by your side!" she cut him with pride, defying him to contradict her.

Hiccup closed his eyes and pinched his nose.

"Astrid, if you are a warrior of Berk, you have to follow the orders..."

The words had barely left his mouth that he knew he had made a mistake. Astrid paled even more, her eyes, usually benevolent when it came to him, turned to a blue as hard as steel.

"So I'll disobey, banish me if you want..." she hissed, getting closer to him with a look so threatening that he took several steps back. But Astrid shot him one last furious glare before turning on her heels and leaving the room with long strides. However, he managed to catch her before she left.

"Astrid!"

She turned so abruptly that he almost bumped into her, but she immediately began to shout, pushing on his chest with her index with aggressiveness.

"How dare you? How can you be so selfish? How can you ask me to stay behind? While you're always risking your life? Yes, you are the chief, but I am your wife, and my place is with you!"

"Your place is with our daughter and the others expecting women and children!"

He could almost hear Tuffnut snickering "Yeah, well done, you should ask her to wear a dress and to give up her axe for a cauldron!"

She seized him by the collar and approached her furious face to his.

"I was a shield maiden, I'm a warrior, like every single woman in my family, and I'll always be! Deal with it, banish me, and repudiate me if you want! You have the right to do so, you're the chief after all!"

Her voice and her hands were shaking but she kept her head high, her chin lifted with challenge. Hiccup gasped and stared at her with horror.

"To repudiate? What? No! I... Never! Astrid, I love you, I could never repudiate you! Except... What is... You would like to..."

leave me?"

She could tell with the uncertainty that haunted his big green eyes, the young Hiccup, clumsy and unhappy, was never far behind the wonderful man, brave and capable of leading men and dragons, that he had become. She softened and sighed.

"No Hiccup, of course not, I love you more than anything, but you have to stop trying to leave me behind, I know that you do care about me, but put yourself in my place..."

The more rational part of his brain agreed, Astrid was a warrior, it was in her blood, she was as fierce and determined on a battlefield as she could be soft and conciliatory in their couple. Besides, it would have been unfair to leave her behind, knowing he wouldn't have bare the waiting if he had to stay behind.

But there was that irrational part of him, which could simply not accept the idea that she could be injured or worse... She saw the pain in his eyes, she was saddened to be the reason of it, but she couldn't stay behind, not after all that happened. Staying out of the action during her pregnancy had already been hard, she refused to experience it again. Not knowing what was happening, not being able to have her lover's back, for what she only did trust herself.

Waiting away from the battle would be the worst torture.

"Losing my father was very hard, but I'm still here... Astrid, if I lose you, I'm not sure to get over it... Be careful, I beg you..."

She approached and slipped her hands along his firm and inviting arms before placing them on his shoulders. She looked attentively at him, following his square jaw, the shape of his mouth, pressed into a thin and tense line, the small scar adorning his chin, auburn locks that struggled over his eyes. Did he realize how much she loved him? Was he that clueless?

"We are togetherâ€¦ Until death pulls us apart" she whispered.

He rested his forehead against hers, she could feel his hot breath on her face.

"I'm asking you only one thing... Don't leave me, survive..."

"I expect the same from you..."

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The first islands of the archipelago appeared enshrouded with a soft golden haze as the sun rose over the new day. When the first familiar Islands appeared, Johann anchored at the request of Hiccup.

"Listen, he said, looking at his friends, I don't know what we're going to find there..."

He looked exhausted, concerned, tensed. He used to be the optimistic voice in Berk for years, but this time, he looked uncertain, as if he doubted their success.

All exchanged a worried look, and he felt Astrid's hand slip into his. He squeezed her hand, taking in her warm contact the strength to continue, to resist the urge to take his wife, his daughter, and to go far away from this whole mess...

"We have to be careful, Drago's army and the Roman forces are probably already surrounding the island, so we are going to leave the boat here and we'll go with our dragons..."

"Soâ€¦ Sorry Hiccup, but don't they have dragons, precisely?" Fishlegs said.

Hiccup had a familiar smile. He had this small loop sided smile and the sparkle in his eyes which indicated that he had, as often, one or two shots ahead of the enemy. His anxious expression faded away, his face lighted with that smile, and Astrid felt her heart throb briefly.

"They do, and they're expecting us in the sky..."

"Yeahâ€¦ Fineâ€¦ Soooâ€¦ " Ruffnut asked, scratching his head.

"Yeah, so what?" her brother added, pushing her with his shoulder, before being punched by her.

"That's why we're going undergroundâ€¦ Alvin knew about the caves, so did Dagur, but Drago doesn't, he hadn't been so far when he took Berk, he knows nothing about the underpasses..."

"Are you sure about that?" Ruffnut asked, raising her eyebrows, skeptic.

"No, but this is our best option, our only option to be fairâ€¦" Hiccup said. "Our first objective will be to ensure that people in Berk are okay, they have probably found refuge in the cove... Then, we'll have us separate and try to evaluate the enemy forces in order to strike backâ€¦"

They all nodded.

"Drago is stronger and more prepared than the last time we defeated him, he knows us, he knows our weaknesses... We have to be extra carefulâ€¦ Don't forget that his dragons are innocents, I don't know how he controls them, something is wrong, I don't know where he found these new dragons, but what I know, is that they act under his influence..."

He scanned their faces. The chubby and anxious face of Fishlegs, those, excited and eager, of the twins, the proud and arrogant face of Snotlout. And finally, the face, confident and encouraging that he loved more than anything in the world.

Shailaine, Saoirse, and Octavius were all three in a cabin. It was agreed that Johann would take them wherever they want. Hiccup hadn't exchanged a single word with the blacksmith since their escape, and it was the same with Shailaine since the death of Kaleina. She seemed to avoid Astrid, and had indecipherable looks, which hurt Astrid and made her feel confused.

"We have to protect our own, our homes and our families, we're Vikings, and we're going to show Drago that we're even crazier than him!"

His friends cheered.

"For Berk! For our leader!" Snotlout cried, followed by the whole group.

Hiccup smiled gratefully. Hand in hand with Astrid, they advanced towards the bow of the boat and they scanned the horizon in silence. Astrid felt dizzy. Her heart was beating hard and fast. She was about to see again her daughter, and if it should be her time to reach Valhalla, she would go with the satisfaction to have been able to hold her baby against her one last time.

"For Berk..." she whispered, looking at the island appearing as a vague and distant silhouette in the mist.

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**\*\*To be continued...\*\***

End  
file.